THE MIRROR AND THE LAMP

W. B. MAXWELL

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
3 1761 00673609 4

Presented to the
LIBRARY *of the*
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
by

PROFESSOR B.M.
CORRIGAN

THE MIRROR AND THE LAMP

Copyright 1918
The Bobbs-Merrill Company

JAN 1 1971
VERSITY OF

PR
6025
A93M5

PRESS OF
BRAUNWORTH & CO.
BOOK MANUFACTURERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

THE MIRROR AND THE LAMP

THE MIRROR AND THE LAMP

I

Rome resembled Athens, Brussels was just a smaller Paris, one country town is very like another; but St. Dunstan's is like nothing except itself.

Even the idlest tourist at once recognises the spell, and in every minute that he lingers he submits to its deepening force. He is not so much affected by what he sees as by what he feels. The place is old, the streets are narrow, and over all the clustered roofs rises the splendour of the church of Christ; here one pauses with bowed head to gaze at hallowed ground, here one strains lifted eyes to catch the sunlight on stones that look like lace hung as a curtain in the sky; under that archway used to ride mailed warriors; round those cloisters came lines of singing monks; and over the marshy plain, through the night of history, from cities that are dust and lands that have long since lost a name, wended their way century after century the endless pilgrim horde—but all this is nothing, the drone of hireling guides, the tale of a three-penny book, the echo of memory's sleepy tongue. What is real is the faith that clings to the faithful spot. Here men believed; here men are still believing.

It is less than nothing that all which was material should perish and decay, if all that was spiritual and impalpable may continue to live. This is the third church that has stood in the meadow blessed by the saint, and if this too falls a fourth shall take its place; but, new or old, it would always be the same church—the self-same church wherein conquering lords of a savage isle craved pardon from the God-man whom their ancestors had killed, wherein sunbeams slanting down from lofty windows made tremulous tinted halos for a martyr's brow; wherein foreign refugees crept underground to worship in darkness, and praise the maiden queen whose hand was strong enough to hold them safe.

And so it is with the whole town. Time cannot truly touch it, and change leaves it unchanged. Where fierce-eyed Romans used to buy and sell their slaves, bland traders now assemble with samples of hops and grain; the Norman keep is a gas-work, the dungeon mound a nursemaid's garden; the pilgrims' inn and its hundred beds have vanished in flame; carved scrolls and polished stone are succeeded by slates and bricks and plate glass; the vulgar music-hall brings ruin to the legitimate theatre, and in its turn is destroyed by the lantern-flash of a cinema show; boat expresses sweep through iron girders, screaming in the silence of night and belching out foul clouds by day; look where you will, you can see the ugliness of an ugly age, the cynical contempt for grace, the unfaltering grasp at gain; railway companies and jerry-builders, municipal committees and gentlemen speculators, have all tried to spoil the grey old city;—and yet still the air that blows across its three towers is holy, the smoke that rises from its hearths has a perfume of incense, and the murmur of its river is a prayer.

Such and so great has proved the persistent force of the spell.

II

Mrs. Churchill used to tell her sons that when their father died she felt utterly lost. She was overwhelmed by fear as well as by grief. It seemed such a tremendous task that Providence had set before her—to watch over three little fatherless boys all the time while they were changing into three wise good men, ready to fight life's battle, sound of limb and clean of mind.

She further told them that at this period she might have lightened her burden by marrying again; the husband who was in heaven would have understood and approved; only for their sake she had abstained from a second marriage. There and then—that is to say, as soon as the first agony of sorrow had abated and prayer had begun to fortify her—she had made a solemn vow to dedicate herself to their service as long as they should need her. And this they were always to remember—bearing it in mind if the time came when she grew to be a clog rather than a prop—that she had been brave for them when they were small and helpless, and so they must deal gently with her in her old age.

She told them also—and they loved to hear it—how in her perplexity, surrounded by the illimitable callousness of London, when measuring her narrow means and realising that there would be only just enough money to enable them to live decently in some modest remote neighborhood, she had been suddenly inspired to bring them to St. Dunstan's, where they could obtain excellent cheap education at the ancient school, where rents would be low, and where, because of the traditional Christian feeling of cathedral towns, poor gentlefolk may be secretly pitied, but are never openly despised. She said she firmly believed that the idea of coming here to St. Dunstan's had been a veritable inspiration, a guidance by that invisible hand which takes especial pleasure in directing widows and orphans. For see how kind people had been to them down here, and how they had thriven.

These matters, well remembered and often pondered on, became a sort of primal legend for the boys, their story of origin, rich in wonder and mystery as any historical page or romantic song—the journey with divine finger-posts pointing a way out of the labyrinth, the woman braving all things for love, the weak little children that were to grow strong enough to protect instead of being protected. The legend appealed to all that was chivalrous in their natures; it formed the basis of their mother's unquestioned authority; it served, and a hundred times more effectually, for all that in households ruled by men is represented to rebellious youths by stern frowns, angry growling voices, and the dancing torment of a cane.

Whenever severe reproof became necessary Mrs. Churchill adverted to the legend, never failing on these occasions particularly to point out the extent of her sacrifice in abstention from giving them a stepfather.

"You must remember, Tom," she would say to her eldest boy, when he had really disgraced himself, "I was much younger. You must not judge what I was *then* by what I am *now*. There were plenty willing to tempt me to do what no one would ever have blamed me for doing."

"And it was ripping of you not to do it," Tom blurted out hotly and eagerly. "Mother, I swear I'll never forget it—— We'll none of us forget it."

Charles, the second son, contorted his face and writhed his body when this picture of a possible stepfather was conjured up before him.

"Mother, I simply couldn't have stood it. I should have run away to sea—or else murdered him. We couldn't have stood any one between you and us."

"No, Charles, that is what I felt myself. We four must hold together and be all in all to one another."

"Yes, yes."

"Then why cannot you behave yourself, Charles? Do you think it is gentlemanly, or Christian, or even clever, to utter horrid words that a poor neglected street-boy might be ashamed to speak?"

"No, I don't," said Charles, with a fervour of shame and contrition. "I think it was *beastly* of me."

Once, when she had chidden her youngest boy, Edward, for quite a slight fault, and the bogy second father had been almost automatically paraded, she got an answer that queerly changed the orbit of confusion and brought swift moisture to the wrong pair of eyes.

"Suppose I had married again, Edward—where would you have been then? How would you have liked that? You wouldn't have been here—not being pleaded with by the mother who loves and comprehends you, but being blown-up and punished by a comparative stranger. I saved you from that—at some sacrifice to myself. I resisted temptation. I was different then, you know. People said—and I don't think it was a very great exaggeration—no, I think it was true—in those days I was pretty."

"But, mother," said the little boy firmly, "you are pretty *now*. You are the prettiest person I have ever seen."

And perhaps then—for who can say what tiny tortuous paths will one day make the widest roadway to a woman's heart?—Mrs. Churchill for the first time was plainly aware that she loved this boy more tenderly than she loved the other two.

Neither Tom nor Charles could have made such an answer; neither could as yet have dimly guessed that out of all the possible things that might be said this was the right thing to say, the only thing that, from boy or man, would at that moment give exquisite pleasure. Edward was more sensitive than the other two, a finer organism, a more complex instrument that responded to a fainter stimulus: he was going to be very clever and to make his mother very proud.

She folded him in her arms, and held her head above his head so that he should not see her tears.

They lived in one of the old streets near the market-place, and their narrow little house was just large enough to contain them and their single servant. When the wind set from the south the cathedral bells made the window-glass vibrate, and when it set from the east you could hear the clock at St. Martyr's school chiming the hours. In summer the Churchill boys did their "preparation" at home and were not particular about supper; but in winter they always went to evening school, and regularly brought back with them three hearty schoolboy appetites. The two elders especially made the cold meat and pickles fly. Maria, the staunch and trusted maid—to whom every liberty or privilege was permitted except that of giving notice to leave—freely commented on their voracious powers.

"*More* mutton?" she would say, affecting incredulity, as Tom brought his plate once again to the sideboard. "You astound me, Mr. Thomas." And she laughed and whispered as she carved. "I see it's to be *Red Riding Hood* for the pantomime at 'The Royal,' and I'm thinking they wouldn't be far wrong to engage you for the wolf."

"And *you* for Granny," said Tom. "In the revised version, you know, where the old woman is so ugly she frightens the wolf to death."

Tom resumed his seat at the table opposite to his mother, and Charles rose, plate in hand. Then there was more bantering of honest, faithful Maria.

"Another slice, madam."

"Oh, do take the whole joint, Mr. Charles, and save me trouble."

"Buck up, you old slacker—or I'll recite the poem you don't like."

"No, I do *not* like it," said Maria indignantly.

To Mrs. Churchill this supper hour was always extraordinarily pleasant. All day long she had been toiling, and now the friendly night brought rest; she was tired, she was happy. Once again her loved ones were gathered under the roof-tree; all was well, since they were well; the work of her life was safely progressing.

Truly it made a pretty picture: the snug lamp-lit room, the shining young faces, the close-drawn circle of home, and the presiding genius sending out beams to meet each glance that came her way. She was unquestionably still good-looking in a gentle, sedate manner, with a girlish figure, a pale, calm face, and dark hair pulled trimly back from the rigid central parting, but making graceful waves about her ears.

When their meal was nearly over she left the table and began to help the maid in clearing things away; but, while passing to and fro, she watched and listened and smiled, and each night her heart was full of thankfulness and hope. Tom, though only just fifteen, is so big and strong already, with such noble shoulders, such a broad chin, and such deep notes in his voice; Charles is splendidly robust also; and Edward—whose finely-chiselled features, beautiful mouth, and thoughtful brow she has now paused to admire—does not, praise be to God, look in the least delicate.

Their appetites appeased, the two elders talked volubly, while Edward attended to their discourse and seemed to feel that as a junior it would be presumptuous to introduce fresh topics or to lead a line of argument. But in fact the talk was all schoolboy chatter and schoolboy slang, with little perceptible sequence—as, for instance, of how "the Head" endeavoured to be funny and failed; of what Sergeant Miller said to Mr. Westford outside the gymnasium door; of a saloon pistol exhibited with delicious daring by Gordon Secundus under a desk-lid in class.

"The pistol is no use," said Tom disparagingly. "It's not a real weapon. I bet the sergeant would laugh at it as just a *toy.*"

"I bet he wouldn't. It would put a bullet through a man at two hundred yards."

"Rot!" Tom said the word with force, but he continued more doubtfully. "How did Gordon come by it—if it's anything more than a popgun?"

"Swop—from Richardson."

"What was the swop?"

"Gordon's entire stamp collection, his stationary engine, and five bob ready."

"Oh! That shows Gordon believes in it—but it doesn't show anything else. If I was going to risk swishing for a pistol I'd want to be sure it was the real thing."

"Gordon Secundus won't be swished. He's too jolly artful. He'll enjoy that pistol until he twigs it's being too much talked about, and then—you see—he'll swop it on to Saunders, Chuff Brown, or one of that lot, and let them take any swishing that's required."

And at this shrewd prophecy they roared with laughter.

Mrs. Churchill loved that sound of hearty laughter, although evoked by jokes that often seemed pointless to her, and she never checked the high spirits of her boys if she could avoid doing so. But they must of course be considerate for the feelings of others, show respect where respect is due, and above all be gentlemanly, however wild their fun.

Thus to-night she called Tom to order when he began to mock at their vulgar but valuable friend Mr. Barrett; and she also cut short the delayed recitation that Charles was delivering to poor Maria.

"Maria, Maria, with her nose on fire,
    Put on her Sunday clothes.
She'd powdered her cheek for the end of the week,
    But quite forgot her nose."

"Charles, be silent. . . . Good-night, Maria. Don't be vexed with such silly nonsense."

"I don't like it, ma'am," said Maria. "I've told him so."

"But you know he doesn't mean to be unkind. You know he is fond of you—that we are all fond—grateful too—very grateful," and Mrs. Churchill followed Maria to the kitchen, soothing her all the way.

Lastly, when she returned to the room again, she was compelled to administer a more serious rebuke; and now the offender was the one who scarcely ever offended—her own dear Edward.

All in a moment, during her absence, the boys had begun to talk of Christ, and the recent alleged discovery of an entirely new and authentic Gospel.

"It's fudge," said Tom. "Mr. Sedley doesn't credit a word of it. He says the newspapers start such stories. He says they've done it again and again."

"But what a lark," said Charles, "if it was true this time. How sick the beastly atheists would be."

"Yes, it'd let the bounce out of 'em nicely—if what was dug up was proof positive."

"It might be only corroborative evidence," said Charles, obviously quoting a master; "but there would be satisfaction in that."

They talked on, speaking exactly as they had spoken of the gymnasium or the saloon pistol, but with keener interest and an even more noisy enthusiasm; and presently Edward, by reason of his vivacious suggestions, was controlling this debate.

"I wish He'd break His rule and do one miracle—just one."

"So do I. But what?"

"I don't know—something that would be a knock-down blow to unbelievers. Suppose, when one of them was lecturing—you know, lecturing against God, as Mr. Nicholson says they do in London—suppose all the lights went out."

"I don't see much in that," said Tom.

"Jolly tame miracle that'd be," said Charles.

"But I mean all over London," said Edward eagerly. "The railway stations—everywhere—so that nobody could go anywhere. And when all the workmen tried to mend the gas-pipes and the electric wires, they *couldn't*."

"Yes," said Charles, taking to the idea, "that would be rather a suck and a sell."

"And it would mean," Edward went on intensely, "'Let those who have refused the light remain in darkness!' And they'd find out that the churches could be lit up just the same as ever—people would see the lighted windows. And even the atheists would understand the meaning of the miracle."

"What a funk they'd be in!"

"But would they really twig He'd done it?"

"The crowd would hang them on the lamp-posts."

"No," said Edward, "He wouldn't let it go as far as that. He'd frighten them half out of their wits, but He'd save their lives. He wouldn't do a miracle with death in it."

"What price the swine? I call atheists the dirtiest sort of swine."

"Or suppose," cried Edward excitedly, "He just burned up every unbelieving book as fast as the printers could print it. Or suppose He rang all the bells in the world without a human hand touching them; or——"

And then Mrs. Churchill interposed.

"Edward," she said crushingly, "of whom are you speaking in that flippant irreverent tone? You have pained me inexpressibly;" and truly she was both grieved and shocked.

Edward was overcome by confusion. He could but murmur that he meant no irreverence; he did not know that it was wrong.

"But, Edward," said Mrs. Churchill sadly, "you *ought* to know. You have surprised me. I will say no more. . . . Tom, have you any further work to do for to-morrow?"

"No, mother."

"Very well. Then we will have prayers at once—and all of us go to bed."

With a grave voice and unusually solemn manner, she read a chapter from the New Testament; and after that they all four knelt, bending over the seats of their chairs, to say the lovely evening hymn.

"Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed;
Teach me to die, that so I may
Rise glorious at the awful day."

Edward's face was white and his lips trembled, but his ears showed crimson in the lamplight as he knelt before his chair. He did feel so dreadfully ashamed of himself.

"You little ass," said Charles, when he and Edward reached their joint bedroom, "you have fairly upset the mater. I haven't seen her so upset for ages."

The wind was in the east, and when the clock above St. Martyr's gatehouse chimed the next quarter Charles was soundly sleeping. In his room on the other side of the landing Tom snored comfortably. But for a long while Edward lay wide awake.

Shame and regret tortured him. He thought of himself as many million times worse than a little ass. A double horror made him hot and cold, sending waves of pins and needles along his spine and producing clammy dampness on his neck. He had wounded the mother he fondly adored and insulted the God he devoutly worshipped.

Inadvertently; yes, but that was no excuse, and not for a moment did he attempt to console himself with it. He *ought* to have known better. Christians, gentlemen, boys whose dim beginnings are like a Bible chapter or a chanted psalm, should not commit such brutal ignorances.

A restless, unappeasable activity of thought made him feel as if he would never sleep again; his eyes in this dark room saw vivid pictures; memory and imagination worked together to show him all that he had truly seen or merely dreamed of; space and time seemed nothing, the present and the past were one. He was here tossing on his bed; he was hundreds of miles away. Thus he saw the sunlight on distempered walls, a trapeze and iron bars, and the bare-armed sergeant swinging Indian clubs; and in the very same minute he saw the white-robed figure of a bearded man standing in a moonlit garden and leaning outstretched open hands against the horizontal branches of a tree. One picture belonged to yesterday and close by—Miller in the school gymnasium. The other picture was recorded in a distant land nearly two thousand years ago—the Redeemer of Mankind making the shadow of His cross fall on the moonlit ground of Palestine. The first picture was a memory, the second an imagination; but to Edward Churchill one was as absolutely real as the other.

III

It is proper that boys should feel a glowing pride in their school, and the Churchills, together with their two hundred fellow-pupils, were proud of St. Martyr's. It was not Eton or Winchester; but it was grand and old, perhaps the oldest foundation in England—indeed, it was claimed to be so. Moreover, as all things are relative and comparison is the only firm base on which young minds can frame their rough and ready estimates, the fact that the city of St. Dunstan's contained two other palpably inferior schools helped to puff up all happy Martyrites with a becoming self-glory.

Day boys were numerous, and, far from being looked down upon, had rather the upper hand. Some element of charity that entered into the boarding arrangement—nominations, presentations, and so forth—proved slightly injurious to social prestige; for, again as is probably proper or at least inevitable to what has always been admired as the healthy public school spirit, in these halls erected by the order of kind King Henry a certain savage snobbishness of youth made itself plainly perceptible.

It showed itself with strength in the general attitude towards the half-dozen boys who avowedly received food and erudition "free gratis and for nothing." These were the six poor scholars perpetually dowered by the royal founder —"six lads of ample brow but narrow purse," spoken of in the famous poem—or "Henry's paupers," as they were called in the school. No one was unkind to them, but all considered them as fitting targets for shafts of wit; and continued jokes were made at the expense of the six, notwithstanding recurrent commands from the authorities.

Quite lately the present "Head" had delivered a public homily on the subject, linking it with the wider topic of good taste, comradeship, and *esprit de corps*. "Let me tell you," he said, "that if I began to mock at poor scholars, I could name a hundred in this establishment—scholars who are poor in scholarship, poor in the sense of humour, poor in industry; intellectual paupers, mendicants of other folk's ideas, outcasts from the fair temple of true learning."

The boys enjoyed this, felt that "Whiskers" had distinctly scored, and, had they not been in chapel, would have loudly applauded. They always liked rhetorical invective when addressed to their mass. Only when called upon to bear the brunt of it individually, did it ever disturb them—and then not too painfully.

Day boys gained importance and boarders lost it by the circumstance that the school's greatest day of the year occurred in the holidays just after Christmas. This was the Martyr's Feast, and as the boarders had all scattered to their respective homes, only residents were left at St. Dunstan's for the grand celebration. They told boarders all about it with a most patronising care—the glorious gathering in the school hall; the reading of the Archbishop's annual letter, which always began with the time-honoured words, "Boys of St. Martyr's, greeting and good-will;" the recitation of a poem first in Latin, then in English, on the subject of one of the noble virtues; and, finally, the procession to the cathedral and special service there.

"Dickson, I'm describing it rottenly, but it was really ripping—best Feast I've seen. Every one said so."

"Sorry you chaps are shut out of it all."

"Wonder your governor didn't bring you down for it. If I was you, I should have told him I'd rather see the Feast than forty blooming pantomimes."

Naturally this sort of thing made the absentees feel rather small, until echoes of the Feast faded out of the residential chatter.

Now and then there were added to the school roll a boy or two from a higher, if not necessarily a superior, stratum of society than that to which the rest belonged. These were generally sons of soldiers quartered at the cavalry barracks; and they sometimes incautiously explained their presence as an accident, saying that in the ordinary course of events, if it had not proved more convenient to follow the rattle of their parents' kettledrums, they would have gone to aristocratic establishments where noble lords their cousins were all ready to welcome them. For such siding and bounce, until they dropped the practice of both vices, their lives were made a burden; but on these occasions it was certainly an insidious, although unacknowledged, comfort to Tom and Charles Churchill to be able to take very high ground in condemning the glorification of rank and pedigree.

For really, if one wanted to brag about one's family, they themselves were better qualified than anybody else to do it. Their mother had always allowed them to understand that they could claim kinship with *the* Churchills. She used to talk in a vague yet satisfying fashion of cadets of noble houses going out into the world to earn their livelihood, of great families getting enormously widespread, of some members going up and others going down. They were not, of course, descendants of the illustrious duke, but they were of his house. There was no reason why they shouldn't be.

But Charles and Tom often joked about the large hoarding advertisements of "Churchill's popular boot-paste." The pictorial posters of the commodity were well displayed at St. Dunstan's, as everywhere else. "No relation to us; but dash the bounder's cheek for using our name without by your leave or for your leave."

Once when Tom had been pestered by a crest-collector to produce examples of the Churchill coat-of-arms, Mrs. Churchill told him that his father never troubled about heraldic devices. Being in business, he did not think it necessary. She added that all his branch of the family was commercial.

"*Not* the boot-paste, mother?"

"Oh, no, nothing whatever to do with the boot-paste. I feel sure those people are not *real* Churchills."

There was nothing derogatory in commerce for cadets of noble houses, but Tom felt exceedingly glad it didn't mean the boot-paste; and if he never boasted of his fine connections, perhaps secret thought of them made him rather intolerant of open, unquestionable plebeianism. For instance, he and Charles loathed that vulgarian Mr. Barrett, and nothing but respect for their mother's wishes enabled them to be decently civil to him.

Mr. Barrett was the auctioneer of Halberd Street, through whose agency Mrs. Churchill had originally taken her house; and since then he had been useful to her in arranging for renewals of the tenancy, and even in advising her on general business matters. To the boys he seemed a common, encroaching person: a sandy, flabby creature, with a sycophantic manner that changed in a moment to gross familiarity if you weren't on your guard with him; a horrid Low Church believer, who went to Holy Trinity instead of to St. Alban's or the cathedral, who spoke of the deity as "Him who" and of his invalid wife as "pore Mrs. Barrett."

His only mitigating attribute was the reverential respect that he professed to entertain for Mrs. Churchill. He would stand on the pavement bare-headed, as though uncovered before a queen, until she said, "Oh, do please put on your hat;" and even then he apologised for obeying her.

That the young Mr. Churchills liked—but they did not like his coming round of an evening and drinking weak whisky-and-water while he held forth on railway debentures and corporation loans. They did not like his making their mother visit the sick wife. They preferred that she should consort only with the wives of the masters, the clergy, the medical profession—in a word, with the gentry. Mr. Barrett, however, by fawning and flattery, seemed to be able to make not only Mrs. Churchill but everybody else do what he desired. And if the arts of humbleness failed him, he overcame you by sheer impudence.

Thus, meeting Tom one day in the open street, he offered him half-a-crown as a tip. Think of it! A tip from a tradesman to a gentleman—a tip to a fifth form boy, who was a member of the football team—and a tip of two shillings and sixpence. Tom nearly suffocated. He didn't know what to do; he thought he was going to knock Mr. Barrett down; and in the end—as he himself said, ruefully repeating the ancient facetiousness—he pocketed the insult.

"There," said Mr. Barrett, "don't stand on ceremony. See, it's a bright new one, and will burn a hole in your pocket before you can look round. Go on," and he laughed in an oily maddening way. "I've bin a boy myself."

When Tom described this incident to his brothers, Charles said, rather cynically, "Well, if you didn't punch his head, I don't see what else you could do but take his money."

And Edward said it was quite right to take it. Anything was better than hurting people's feelings.

But now, before long, something occurred to give Tom a wider and more philanthropic view of that immense majority of mankind called vulgar, middle-class, humbly born, and other ugly names by the exclusive, aristocratic, grandly descended few.

During the Easter holidays he and the others had a glimpse of their great-aunt.

Never till now had they heard of the existence of this old lady, and they were indignant, and disposed to be implacable towards her, when their mother told them that she had been far from kind or considerate in the past. But at present it seemed that she was contrite for ancient unkindness, she wanted bygones to be begones, and she longed to make the acquaintance of her great-nephews. Mrs. Churchill said that one must forget and forgive; adding that the poor old soul, although rich, was probably sad and lonely, and further warning them that she might appear to their eyes a little eccentric and they were on no account to laugh at her.

That warning was not unneeded; for Aunt Jane struck them as being the most tremendous joke that had as yet ever come to enliven them. When presented to her in her sitting-room at the Rose Hotel, where she had taken up her quarters for a few days with her maid and her lap-dog, they really wanted to lie on the floor in order to laugh at their ease.

She was a fat, round little woman, richly apparelled in velvet and lace, with all sorts of golden and jewelled ornaments; and the way she laughed, cackling like a hen, the way she talked to the waiters and the maid, the way she tried to make the dog jump through her arms, waddling about the room after him, and tripping on her rich skirts—all these unexpected phenomena impelled one to hysterical mirth, and made one class her with such immortally ludicrous types as Ally Sloper, the Widow Twankey, or Miss Moucher.

"My dears, you're welcome," she said hospitably; "and your dear Ma I must kiss again. Edith, my dear, I *am* so glad to make it up at last;" and then she shouted to the waiter to hurry with dinner.

They were to dine in the sitting-room, and the table was all set out and ready on their arrival.

"More cosy," she said, "more homey, more kumm-il-fo than downstairs in that horrid big kaffy-room. . . . Well, Tom—you are Tom?—what are you going to be all in good time one of these days when you're quite grown up?"

Tom replied that he was going to be a clergyman.

"That's right. Very nice, I'm sure. I like clergymen—not *all,* but some. The Reverend Canon Forster, of Hove, is a very old friend of mine. . . . And Charles—this *is* Charles, isn't it?—what are *you* to be?"

Charles said that he also was going into the Church.

"Oh, bless us and save us!" cried Aunt Jane. "How good we all are!"

Mrs. Churchill explained that it was a vocation with both of them; they had never deviated in their wish to enter holy orders, and as well as making her happy it was working out very conveniently, because they could remain at school until they were nineteen and then pass on to the theological college in this very town. There would thus be no disruption of home life in the early stages of their careers.

"And how about young hopeful? What does Number Three intend to be?"

Edward said that he had not yet made up his mind.

"An excellent answer too," and Aunt Jane gave her side-splitting imitation of poultry. "P'raps you haven't got a mind to make up yet awhile, Teddy—Teddy's right, eh? And take Auntie's advice. When you feel it's there, all waiting to be made up—well, do it yourself, Teddy, and don't expect or allow other people to do it for you. . . . But there, I shall be putting my foot in it. Merest fun, Edith, . . . Come! To table! And let me have Mr. Teddy on my right hand."

She was disconcertingly vulgar, and one could see that Mrs. Churchill felt constraint in her company. But the hearts of the boys rapidly warmed to her; and, although it made Tom shiver when he thought of possibly having to show her round St. Martyr's, yet he began to recognise in her " a real good old gump." She meant well; she was amiable, if vain and silly; and she certainly gave them what in school jargon might be termed a *gloriosum festum atque multum vinum fizzibum.*

"I know boys like pop," she said, as the first cork was discharged; "and it can't hurt them, Edith, once in a way. Have another cutlet, Charles. Cutlets drive away growing pains. There's roast turkey and plum pudding to follow. They told me downstairs the menoo wasn't seasonable, but I said 'Bother the seasons.' . . . My dears, it does me good to have you all around me—and I hope you'll visit me at my little house in Montagu Square. I'll take you to the theatres, and show you Madame Toosso's."

It was after dinner that the great discovery occurred.

Tom, cheered and replenished with the good fare, and becoming expansive, persisted in talking of "the family," asking many questions, to which his hostess replied quite readily.

All those grandeurs were a myth—or at least an hypothesis deduced from very slender materials. The boys' father and Aunt Jane's late husband belonged to Midland folk who for three generations had been engaged in the wholesale hardware trade. There were, it appeared, many of these hardware Churchills, some prospering, some doing little beyond keeping their heads above water.

"Your papa," said Aunt Jane, "offended us—but that's an old story, and far too much was made of it at the time. But, as no doubt mamma has told you, he represented the original house in London—and if he didn't make a success of the London agency, I dare say that was no fault of his. Times were beginning to change. We were getting behind them."

Mrs. Churchill sat in silence during all this talk, neither endorsing anything nor contradicting anything; but Edward, watching her, saw that she stirred uneasily and bit her lip when they came to speak of boot-paste.

"No, I'm sure I wish we *were* the 'boot-paste Churchills,'" said Aunt Jane. "No such luck! *What* that firm must have piled up!"

And at last Tom tackled the question of the ducal leader of the clan. Could Aunt Jane trace the links between us and him?

Aunt Jane cackled. "Oh, no doubt we're all one lot—if you go back far enough. Yes, there's the best authority for that;" and she cackled most merrily. "We all come down from the same couple—the man and woman who started the biggest family on record. You know who I mean."

"Adam and Eve?" said Tom, after a long pause.

"Just so," said Aunt Jane.

Not even cadets of the boot-paste—just nobodies. Tom, returning to the subject that night after he and his brothers had gone up to bed, said he felt glad he was past his seventeenth birthday, and therefore strong enough to stand the shock.

"I don't mind twopence," said Charles; "but it is a bit of a suck and a sell."

Edward said nothing, and neither of the other two asked his opinion. He had gone to the bedroom window, and he stood with his back to the room. It was a clear still night, a touch of late frost in the air; and he looked sadly and wistfully upward at the fixed stars—one of which was shining with a much diminished brightness. His mother had deceived him.

IV

"MOTHER dear, everything else you ever told us is true, isn't it?"

"Yes, every word—every smallest word. Oh, Edward." And Mrs. Churchill began to cry.

Aunt Jane had gone back to London, and Edward for the first time had spoken to anybody about that trifling disillusionment.

"Oh, oh, oh!" And Mrs. Churchill sobbed hysterically. "I hope I may never set eyes on her again—I don't want her money, none of it. I hate her—a horrid, wicked old woman to come between my dearest son and me."

"Nothing can come between us," said Edward wildly. "Oh, mother, forgive me for what I said."

It was terrible to him to see that dear face convulsed with grief, the venerated head bowed down, the gentle delicate fingers opening and shutting themselves spasmodically. In a frenzy of self-reproach he begged her to forget his rash and foolish words. But for a while she would not be consoled.

They were alone in her room—a place that had been to him like the storehouse of his earliest, most tender memories, and that was now with increasing intelligence and imagination as sacred to him as a shrine.

"My darling—my darling mother."

Presently they sat in the cushioned window seat where she used to teach him his first lessons, and he held her with his arm about her waist, kissing her wet eyelids, imploring pardon, feeling half dead with love and pain.

The spring sunbeams came softly above their heads, shedding a delicate radiance throughout the room, lighting up solid objects, and seeming to touch with a tremulous reverence all pretty, fragile things. He looked at her writing-desk and thought of how she had sat there hour after hour struggling to learn a little Latin so as to be able to help him in his work; at the curtains that hid the alcove and her bed;

at the bedside table standing outside the curtains. The sight of this table used to affect him with a sense of awe and mystery. It always carried a small pile of her devotional books; above the books, fixed to the wall, there was a crucifix made of ivory and black wood; and above that, again, hung his father's photograph. All this was quite unchanged, exactly as he had always seen it; but he noticed, by the books, a green twig of spruce that she had brought away with her from St. Alban's church on Palm Sunday.

"Edward, I'll explain, so that you'll understand and not blame me."

"Mother!"

"It was silly—but I didn't want to practise any unworthy deception." She had dried her eyes now, and was speaking calmly; only her voice shook, and her hands, clasping his, were hot and limp. "It came from my pride and love—in the beginning—from nothing else."

Then she told him that her marriage was a love match, a runaway match, and that it created an irrevocable breach with her own family as well as with the Churchill family. The Churchills wanted her husband to marry somebody else, a rich unattractive hardware cousin, and they never forgave him for not doing so; while her people, who were well-born, poor, old-fashioned, and stupidly, obstinately narrow-minded, looked down on trade, said that young Mr. Churchill was common, and sternly forbade her to encourage his addresses. She herself, brought up among those who esteemed rank and valued gentle blood, could not eradicate all false pride; and she suffered greatly because of the contempt poured out upon the man she loved. She denied what her parents said, she vowed that he was not only a gentleman, but a very fine gentleman.

"And, Edward, I used to pray that, some day, somehow, we should be able to prove it—to show that he was really better born than I was. I loved him so—was so proud of him himself, and it broke my heart to think of others scorning him.

"And, Edward," she went on, with a burst of enthusiasm, "I *know* he must have descended from rulers and not from slaves. You had but to look at him. Come now—look for yourself;" and they went across the room, and stood before the fading photograph. "Look at his mouth and chin—and the way his hair grew; not rough and coarse in a tuft above his forehead, as you see in common people. Observe the nose—well-modelled—just like a Greek statue. And his hands were beautiful—not common hands. In everything he showed *race*—really and truly.

"And so I carried on my fiction—no, not fiction, my belief—when my father and mother were gone, when all were gone, and I was left quite alone with you three. You all show the same signs. I couldn't let you think—if I could help it—that your father was beneath anybody or anything. Do you understand?

"You are like him, Edward. You have beautiful hands like his. And your forehead is noble." As she spoke she pushed back his hair, and brought her face close to his. "You are my beautiful son—beautiful in mind and body. And you might be a prince—all the world would proclaim it. Kiss me, and say that you understand."

"Yes, yes—quite."

Then they sat again in the window. They were happy now, both of them, drawn nearer together than they had ever yet been.

"I couldn't bear it, Edward, if you lost confidence in me. I'd rather you knew me for just exactly what I am—so that you wouldn't expect too much of me. Heavens knows I have put duty before pleasure. I have tried to be good."

"You are as good as the angels."

"I have tried to make myself stronger and stronger, but there are weaknesses in my nature. I am weak in many ways—about myself—as weak as lots of women I despise. Sometimes I long for worthless evanescent things—praise, flattery even, the encouragement of other people's good opinion. But all that will soon be over. Soon I shall scarcely be a woman at all—I shall be old and ugly, grey and bloodless——"

"No, never."

"Yes. But what does it matter—so that my children are contented? I shall live again in their lives. . . There my boy must go out now, and play his games and be joyous and free."

After this day the bond between mother and son was always growing in strength. It was as though something new within him had been born at the sight of the tears that he himself had caused. Something had died too; but that which he had gained was infinitely more precious than what had been taken away from him.

And there were things that he had hitherto been able to do with great enjoyment that he could never do again. Before this it had seemed perfectly natural that he and his brothers should leave her altogether to her own devices while they sought pleasure far away; that she should stand on a doorstep kissing her hand in farewell, and then vanish from one's thought, almost fade from the zone of memory, during long hours and even whole days; until, tired and hungry, one came lounging home and she resumed existence in a welcoming smile. But now he thought of her, carried her image with him, whether far or near.

Once, when an unexpected half-holiday befell the school, and games were impossible by reason of the flooded condition of both playing-fields, he started in congenial company for a long ramble. His party meant to push far out into the country; the sun shone; all the voices rang out loud and clear; and there was joy in walking fast, in looking at distant horizons, in shaking off the insipidity of too familiar surroundings. Then all at once, only a mile out on the western road, his spirits suddenly sank. He thought of his mother alone in the empty house. She had declared that there were a lot of odds and ends she wished to attend to, that she would be busy and contented, that the time would fly; nevertheless he could not escape from the mental picture of loneliness and sadness. It was spoiling all his pleasure.

He gave some excuse for deserting the noisy band, and hurried home. His mother uttered an exclamation of delight when, hot and flushed and eager, he burst in upon her and said that he had returned to take her for a stroll.

They spent the whole afternoon together, taking tea at a little shop in Abbot's Lane, sauntering on the old walls, sitting on benches in the public garden, talking with open hearts. And he never thought of his late companions ranging wide over the hillsides and through the vales. He was at peace and felt no regrets.

"But I don't want to tie you to my apron-strings," she said, with the utmost sincerity. "I have always kept it before me, that as my boys grew up I must to a certain extent lose them. All I have hoped is that none of you would desire to leave me absolutely—to put seas and continents between us—to go right to the other side of the world."

And Edward said that he would never do that, whatever happened. If they could not always live under the same roof, at least he would never go far away. He would stay within reach. "I swear it, mother. I swear it, as a vow."

"Ah, Edward, my altruist."

"No," he said emphatically, "it is not altruism—it is selfishness. I could not be happy otherwise."

And, not for the first time, she sounded him this afternoon about his ideas in regard to the future. Had he any inclination to do what his brothers had decided upon doing?

"Mr. Jennings says he sees in you many qualities that suggest the Church as perhaps the profession that would best suit you."

"Mr. Jennings doesn't really know me. Mother, I don't know myself. Sometimes I think— Oh, a man ought to be very good to be a priest. I could not trust myself to say—I'm too young to know myself."

She expressed approval of these words. They were so wise. One must, of course, wait until one felt quite sure. Nothing could be more dreadful than to make a mistake about so sacred a step.

"Because it is for all time, Edward. Once a priest always a priest."

They had come along the path upon the wall and were entering the outer precincts of the cathedral. The sun was down now, and all about them the greyness of dusk spread fast. Vague and tremendous, the great church loomed like a cliff in front of them, with jagged broken summits that glowed redly in the last light of the day.

"But, whatever you decide, Edward, I shall approve. I'd never oppose your wish—or even try to guide it. I place a confidence in you that I cannot in dear Tom or Charles. You understand me, as they never did;" and she leaned upon his arm, joining her hands about it, as they walked beneath the darkness of an arch. "You are more to me—much more than the others. You know it, my dearest; so why shouldn't I confess it? I am *just* to them, and always will be—making no outward difference. I know you would be miserable if I did. But God pours the measure of love into our hearts. It is His measure, not ours, and we cannot alter it."

In the lamplight of their home he used to observe her when she fancied herself unobserved, searching her face for any lines or wrinkles that might hint at age, thrilling with joy when she looked young and fresh, feeling cold dread when she looked weary and pale. He wished to toil for her, fight for her, die for her—if by death he could save her from peril and pain. Even when on his knees, praying to the throne of grace, angry revolt rushed into his mind as he remembered the shortness of this mortal life, the terrific edict that spares neither the virtuous nor the wicked. He prayed night and day that she might be given long years in which he could guard and cherish her, and that when at last she died his life might soon be done.

It was a great love, and yet few people guessed at its existence, and she herself never knew a hundredth part of its power. He could not tell all of it to her, and to no one else could he even speak of it. It made no external change in him; at school he was just what he had always been, working hard enough to please the masters, but not so hard as to offend the boys. He did not shine at games, although he showed a sort of fitful ardent aptitude in every game they played. He was not anyhow conspicuous; yet gradually all recognised that in a progressive, unobtrusive, inexplicable way he had become astoundingly popular. He was the boy that no one spoke of and the boy that every one liked.

If any envious schoolmate, chancing to fathom his secret, had said, "You fellows are deceived in this third Churchill. He is nothing but a milksop and a mammy's darling"—well, that boy would have been called a liar, a sneak, a dirty chuff.

Yet it was a very great love, although throughout the dawn of adolescence Edward Churchill contrived to hold it sacred and secret, a splendid mystery far down beneath the surface of things. His love for his mother and his ever-deepening religious faith mingled and became one. She was his Madonna—all that the Blessed Virgin can be to the most transcendentally fervid Catholics.

V

But in spite of fervours of religious emotion that thus were fed from a dual source, he showed a curious sort of reluctance against becoming a full and accredited member of the Church. When contemporaries were being confirmed he obtained a year's postponement, and for a second time, not without difficulty, his confirmation was delayed.

He did not feel ready. With this explanation Mrs. Churchill succeeded in satisfying herself and the authorities. Truly it was not the ceremony of laying on of hands that he shrank from, but the rite that must follow it. Lying awake at night he used to think of our Lord's last supper, seeing in imagination the actual feast, hearing the wonderful words that instituted for all time that shadow of the reality which was to bind men together in holy communion; and it seemed to him that this, the most mysterious and soul-stirring of all sacraments, should have been reserved as a reward for tried virtue, and not be lightly and presumptuously approached by the young and untested. He felt that participation in it should be the end of one's youth and the beginning of a lifelong enterprise; and some voice of instinct seemed to warn him, to try to appal him, as though saying in a distorted echo of his mother's words: "It is once and always. Keep your liberty of choice as long as you can. You are still free, but when the consecrated cup is held towards you—in the moment when your lips touch the red shadow of His blood—your freedom will be gone for ever."

One saint's day in mid-term a certain newly-appointed suffragan-bishop came to the school chapel, and there preached on "The Inner Life." He at once secured attention by his informal method, and when presently the coughing of Jarvis and another boy interrupted the sermon, he altogether captivated his audience with a remark about cough lozenges being cheap and easily procurable. All then listened; but Edward Churchill, listening with the rest, could scarcely believe his ears. For it was as though this man had been sent to preach to him alone and to answer half his secret thoughts.

The preacher told him that every one is apparently offered the choice of two lives, either of which he may live—the inner life or the outer life; but that eventually, in old age, we find that only one of these lives is possible—the inner life.

"That is a simple fact," he said; "with nothing about it that need frighten or even worry us. The dwelling-place wherein we all must dwell, when our wanderings are over, when we have exhausted our physical energy and can no longer strive and fight or love or hate as we used to do, is our own mind. There is the palace or the hovel in which we are to finish our days. And the queston that I am going to ask you, the question of paramount importance that I pray you to ask yourselves, is, What are you going to make of this last resort, this place to which you will be forced to withdraw sooner or later? You can make of it what you will; but you must begin the making now. It can truly be a palace, a glorious, noble home where you may sit enthroned as a king, and look through crystal-clear windows at floods of heavenly light; or it can be a black and dismal dungeon, windowless, airless, foul. There are the two extremes. Which do you choose? Boys of St. Martyr's, I mean to hammer this question at you. I mean to rub it into you—as I believe you would elegantly express it. This is your *real* choice. The other choice is only apparent—not *real*. Your real choice and freedom lies in what you are going to make of the minds that God has given you."

And then, after speaking with great earnestness, he resumed his genial chatty tone, and told the boys how they were to set about improving their minds without an hour's delay. He gave them rudimentary notions of psychology, quoted natural philosophers, and gossiped and almost chaffed about metaphysical speculation and all the time Edward Churchill was thinking: "This is true. . . . This is solid. . . . This is based on unchanging laws. . . . These are things that have confused me, and now I begin to understand them."

Then the preacher again used for the human mind that image of a place which one could build oneself. He said that one should visit it frequently, inspect it carefully, see for oneself that the building process was going on all right. He said that, unlike houses made by hands, it should always be comfortable and dwellable throughout its course of construction. And it should be used as a church too: the convenient and accessible place into which one can go at any moment for rest and peace.

He said that the saints and fathers habitually spoke of "prayer and meditation," linking the two words together as if they symbolised things of almost equal value; but in the hurry and bustle of modern life there seemed only time for prayer, and people were tempted to ignore the necessity of meditation also. He told the boys to let no day pass without meditation. "Retire into yourselves, if only for five minutes, and just think quietly."

Then he wound up with "a really jolly bit" about good resolutions; and the way people make them on New Year's Day and break them before Twelfth Night. "We all do it," he said, beaming down on the rows and rows of upturned faces; "and he would be a poor-spirited dull dog who didn't do it. I mean the making of good resolves, not their breaking, of course. We say to ourselves, 'In this year that begins to-day I am going to be a better, kinder, cleverer boy than I was in the year that's ending to-day.' Believe me, such resolutions are worth making; while their influence lasts they effect something; and it's a fatal mistake to suppose that, even when we fail to continue acting up to the fixed ideal, we are worse off than if we had never tried to succeed. Now take this from me as what the sportsmen call a straight tip. Don't reserve such resolutions for the first of January. A year may begin on any date in the almanac. Let a year begin for you every morning. Make every day your New Year's Day. . . ."

This sermon created a great impression on the school. There were boys here and there who distinctly modified their conduct, and wrestled with the thraldom of old-established habits. On all sides one heard scraps of talk about the Inner Life, and for some little time "A happy new year to you," was quite the fashionable thing as a morning salutation.

Curiously enough, the boy who seemed to be most profoundly affected was the last one in the world from whom you would have anticipated any reaction at all from such a stimulus. Yet Jarvis, to everybody's surprise, stoutly declared that the bishop-suffragan had revolutionised his entire view of existence.

Jarvis was an odd, blinkng, shambling boarder, who more than once had been publicly denounced as incorrigibly lazy and faint-hearted at his work, but who nevertheless had, to his present age of eighteen, escaped the often imminent catastrophe of "supersession." He was a boy who drifted on the surface of things and seemed incapable of taking a dive into the deeps of thought; he loved tittle-tattle—not *sneaking,* of course, but foolish chatter about individuals; he read trashy novelettes; and last, but not least, gave frequent performances of his famous graveyard cough.

At request, he would stand in King Henry's corridor and cough until the old stone walls seemed to shake with hollow thunder. Once after thus rousing the echoes to his ugly music, he spat some blood upon the stone pavement; and since then he had pleaded, "No encores. I'll do it with pleasure. But you chaps really mustn't encore me."

Generally the school tolerated him as an amiable, inoffensive person who had been there for a prodigious long time, but of late sixth form boys had complained of his shabby appearance. "I wish," they used to say, "that Jarvis would treat himself to a new suit. Speak to him, somebody. Tell him that he is beginning to look like a scarecrow, and that it won't do."

If spoken to by somebody, Jarvis flushed and made excuses, referred vaguely to his aunt at Dover, and treated himself to the graveyard cough instead of to the new suit.

Nowadays he used to come limping after Edward Churchill on his way to the gymnasium or the library, and babble of the Inner Life.

". . . Yesterday evening I meditated thirty-seven minutes by the clock, and all the time I didn't know where I was. I'd like to do it with you one evening, Churchill. Give me an appointment—and we'll do it one against the other. . . . Going in there? Then good-bye for the present."

Edward Churchill had been drawn to explore the school library in search of books that purported to describe the workings of the human mind, and his form-master had furnished him with a short list of philosophers whom he ought to consult.

"It's all antiquated stuff, you know. So don't go swallowing it wholesale. If you ever want to study psychology, you must begin with physiology. . . . And by the way," said Mr. Sedley, "don't be introspective."

"No, sir?"

"Introspection is the curse of the present age. There is too much thinking and dreaming, and not enough *doing* in this old England of ours. When you've finished mugging over the stuff up there, get the taste of dust out of your mouth by reading Carlyle."

"I have read some of him, sir."

"Then read some more. Read his *Heroes and Hero Worship*. History is made by people who go about and act, not by people who sit brooding and weighing consequences, and examining their personal motives. A healthy man oughtn't to be conscious of his inside—whether it's his tummy or his mind."

Edward Churchill had a high respect for Mr. Sedley's judgment, but this advice, coming so soon after the bishop's sermon, jarred strangely.

He returned again and again to the library, and, stirring the dust of rarely-turned pages, soon made a startling discovery. Just as that sermon had seemed to be specially addressed to him, so these old books seemed to have been written solely for his benefit. There was, he found, nothing new in his thoughts, nothing unusual. Others had felt what he felt, had felt it more strongly, and had expressed it in the boldest and plainest language. This notion of the unreality, the dreamlike and intangible character of the whole world in which one lived, was probably as old as thought itself. It was a consequence of primeval wonder, when men began to recognise the marvellous scope of their mental powers. When for the first time men carried home with them into the darkness of their caves all the sunlit extent of the hills and plains they had hunted over during the day, they must have asked themselves, "Which, then, is real—what I have seen or what I am seeing?" And with the growth of imagination the doubt would naturally increase instead of diminish, until noble learned students solemnly began to deny the existence of all things external to themselves. That, of course, was a *reductio ad absurdum;* and yet the longer one brooded upon it the less flagrant appeared to be the absurdity.

He sat thinking deeply, doing exactly what Mr. Sedley had declared to be injudicious: staring at the self-contained mystery with introspective eyes, examining his motives, saying to himself, "A life without action is a poor thing, but a life without thought would be nothing at all. One would not even know that one had lived it. And merely to perform actions cannot make one happy; it is only the afterglow of thought in which they are performed again that brings one any peace or joy. And the actions that one performs must not only be good in themselves and done for a good purpose to others, they must be exactly what one wanted and longed to do. Otherwise the horrible restlessness of thought is greater than if one had refused to do them, and had wilfully ignored one's duty."

The room, with its low beamed ceiling and narrow mullioned window, was dimly lit, full of silence and motionless shadow; and when one looked out through the small latticed panes of glass one saw the grass plot, a corner of the headmaster's house, and boys passing singly or in groups—all very vivid and bright and solid. The silent shadowy room seemed to symbolise thought; and all that one could see through the window represented life. When one thought intently a grey curtain came down upon the leaded glass, and, though one had not turned one's head, everything outside the window had gone.

Edward Churchill said to himself, "Suppose it is *true,* and not an absurdity. The inner or the outer life? What if, after all, there is *no* outer life? Suppose it is nothing but thought."

For a time now he was always haunted by such ideas. He could not get away from them. They came back, incongruously obtruding themselves, no matter what he was doing —even when he was going to the gymnasium to box.

Mrs. Churchill had wished that her boys should receive instruction in the art of self-defence, and, following his brothers, Edward duly became a pupil of the illustrious Sergeant Miller. This great man took considerable pains with him, teaching him how to use his feet, how to put "stingo" into head blows by aiming always to hit right through people's faces to the back of their skulls, and give "beef" to body blows by imagining that you were inserting your arm up to the elbow through people's ribs. He expressed regret that Edward's lessons were so soon coming to an end.

Here was a man of action if you like, and one might safely say that the better part of all the hero-worship practised at St. Martyr's was evoked by Sergeant Miller. Little boys saw in him the perfect type of manhood, and he made them at once worship and despair. They felt that as the cruel years dragged by they would be able to shout without squeaking, to smoke without being sick; they might be heavy and hairy as Mr. Westford or Mr. Jennings; they might grow up into masters, but never, never could they grow up into sergeants. The biggest and most athletic boys regarded him as their dearest friend; but friendship did not lessen their veneration. The lightest word that fell from his lips was precious. They worshipped his neck and chest, his cast-iron cheeks, his steel-cased limbs—his laugh, his stare, his frown, even his *smell,* that strange odour of nuts, and oil that seemed as the very essence of his stupendous strength.

It was an immense privilege to be admitted to his room behind the gym., and to be shown his museum of personal trophies and treasures—the box that held his medals, the photographic groups of officers, sergeants, band of the 140th regiment, the presentation bowl, the illuminated testimonial, and so on. Beyond this room there was a sort of carpenter's shop with bench and lathe and soldering apparatus, where the sergeant's assistant, Dick, worked all day fashioning clubs and single sticks, or binding and glueing leather grips round dumb-bells; and it was pleasant to linger here also, watching Dick, and asking innumerable questions about the largest dumb-bells ever lifted and the lightest gloves permissible in the prize ring. Indeed, the charm of the gym. and its dependencies was very suave and penetrating, and Edward Churchill, as well as everybody else, surrendered himself to it with satisfaction.

Naturally, the sergeant could not actually box with one. He invited you to hit him as hard as you were able, standing to take his buffet like the knight in *Ivanhoe,* and merely flicking you with an open hand, here, there, and everywhere, to indicate that you were exposing yourself. But if he wished to test a pupil's proficiency, he would call Dick from the shop and tell him to put on his gloves and spar lightly with the gentleman. And he called for Dick now, at Edward Churchill's last lesson.

Dick untied his apron, wiped his sticky hands on a bit of rag, and hurried to the call, snatching up a pair of gloves as he came.

A weedy lad of uncertain age, with large feet and long thin arms, he looked just as weak as water, and yet, *mirabile dictu,* his skill made him more than a match for the biggest boy in the school. No one had ever seen the sergeant give Dick a lesson; he had no practice except when summoned thus from the glue-pots; but it was as though merely living under the eye of the sergeant had been sufficient. Virtue and force had been imparted to him in the atmosphere that he daily breathed.

"No *hitting,* you understand," said the sergeant severely. "Just spar."

"All right," said Dick, after adjusting with his teeth the wrist elastic of his right glove. And the sparring began.

"Steady, sir," said the sergeant. "Don't rush. Take your time. . . . You see how easy he avoids you. His desire being to let you tire yourself without troubling *him.* . . . Very good, Dick. . . . Very nice indeed. . . . Now take a breather, sir."

Then they sparred again; and Edward, warming to the exercise, acquitted himself better. Consciousness of surroundings lessened, the circle of interest narrowed to a smaller and smaller space, in another moment he and Dick were isolated from all the rest of humanity; and it was as if feet and hands could think, and were thinking, as effectively as brains. Edward's mind and body had but one concentrated wish: to do what ages ago was a precept and now had become an instinct—that is, to put stingo and beef into the gloves.

"Balance," cried the sergeant, "balance. Damme, keep your balance."

But he was speaking to Dick and Edward felt a suffusion of pleasure rather than an analysable thought. Dick had staggered, not he.

When they were commanded to stop for another breather, the sergeant rebuked Dick, and Dick answered somewhat morosely.

"Yes, I know—but it's all mighty fine. I'm to play, and he's to slog—and yet I'm not to break away an inch."

"Is he putting anything into it?" asked the sergeant, with tender and solicitous interest.

"Course he is," said Dick. "But I mustn't stop him for fear of hurting him. . . . All right, sir. Come on;" and he gave Edward a sickly but good-natured smile. "I'm paid for it—so don't you mind. But I shall expect a shilling instead of sixpence off you this time."

Then Edward insisted that every embargo should be removed from Dick. Nothing would content him but that Dick should deal with him on equal terms.

"D'you mean it?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes, I do. I want it—just to see."

"Very well," said the sergeant indulgently. "You hear, Dick? Let it be give and take till I stop you."

The long bout that followed was like drinking deep of a fiery potent wine—but a wine that did one good, not harm. Sensation now was certainly the same thing as thought; or, at least, all that might be traced to a lightningly rapid cogitative process was the joy in finding that one could take all that Dick could give. Each smack in the face exhilarated and refreshed one, and of itself produced the appropriately-placed reply. To stagger was a frenzied agony, but to recover was a wild thrill of delight. To take and to give—to give like that, and like that. . . .

"Good. *Very* good." The sergeant's voice was a remote sweet music—a melody that cheered and never disturbed. "Good again. There, stop. That's enough. You've had best part of three minutes."

They had stopped, and they stood smiling at each other, and breathing hard through distended nostrils.

"Give him his bob, sir, and let him go. Get back to your work, Dick."

Then he paid Edward a most gratifying compliment. "You have pleased me, sir"—and he said it with genuine cordiality. "You have surprised and pleased me. Considering the few opportunities you have been enabled to put at my disposal, you do me true credit." These words from the sergeant meant a great deal. And he went on to talk very seriously, telling Edward that no one, of course, can learn boxing in a dozen lessons, and that he ought to have further lessons whenever he could conveniently arrange to obtain them. "If not from me, sir, then from some other party."

And Edward, standing there, proud and contented after the immense enjoyment both of his exercise and the compliment, felt more conscious than ever of the dreamlike unsubstantial nature of the whole thing. The idea came to him in a moment, from nowhere: "All this is fading fast. In a little while the sergeant will be gone; not a boy that I know will be here; all will have vanished. It will be another generation—and boys like myself will go to the library and sit reading the thoughts of dead men. Only that room will be full of life—the thought that alone has survived. Then thought must be everything, and action nothing in comparison." This seemed to him a flash of inexorable logic.

"Have I your attention, sir?" said the sergeant, in a tone that betrayed slightly offended dignity. "I was telling you a street row is not a sparring match. I tell all my gentlemen: 'If you get drawn into a wrangle with one of the bullying fraternity, your best and p'raps your only chance is to knock him down. Don't argue, don't waste time in inviting him to put his hands up—hit him as hard as you can, before he knows what's coming. Step back for room, and knock him down.' And in this respect I b'lieve there's a fallacy that underlies the preaching of the left hand on all occasions. Certainly if—like us professional chaps—your left hand drive is better than your right, why, by all means use it. But is that probable? No. It stands to reason, with nine ordinary gentlemen out of ten, the right arm and the entire right side of the boy is more strongly developed than the other. Then I say to you, as I would to any other ordinary gentleman——"

And the sergeant went on talking very seriously indeed.

VI

All at once the school was shaken by a terrible and scandalous affair. Jarvis, who had left at the spring half-term, was seen acting as an assistant at the glass and china shop in Mitre Street. He wore a black apron and stood outside the shop dusting the common earthenware that was exposed for sale on the pavement; or he swept straw away with a broom; or he helped to unload packing-cases. He had been seen doing these things.

Evidently his sense of shame and degradation was very great, for he looked up and down the street, blinking his eyes, and peering timorously; and when one passed, he flushed, turned his head away, and shambled into the shop. But the horror of the St. Martyr's boys was greater than Jarvis's shame. They said it was a disgrace to the school. Such things probably happened often enough to the other two schools in the town, but never before had the prestige and reputation of St. Martyr's suffered thus.

Nothing else was talked of. Scarcely a word of pity for Jarvis himself was uttered, because, although the boys no doubt were sorry for him, they were sorrier for themselves. And, moreover, the thing was so abnormal that it removed itself from all recognised categories of form, conduct, and sympathetic feeling. Thus small boys frequented Mitre Street merely to stare at Jarvis in fascinated awe, and large boys, walking by the shop, no more thought of greeting Jarvis than he thought of greeting them.

Edward Churchill could not stand the painfulness of all this. Jarvis's black apron and dusting brush had formed a mental picture of misery that interfered with his sleep; and nevertheless he was aware of the instinctive shirking and shrinking, the resistance of immediate inclination, the dead weight of adverse public opinion that had to be overcome on the day when he went down Mitre Street and talked to Jarvis outside the shop. It was difficult even then, and Jarvis did not make it easier. He kept flushing and coughing; but at last he agreed to the arrangement that they should spend next Saturday afternoon together.

They met accordingly when Saturday came and slunk out of the town, over the meadows and far away from all other boys. Jarvis led, and by the time they had gone a couple of miles he was tired.

"Let's cross the railway," he said, "and find somewhere sheltered where we can sit a bit."

There was a level crossing close to them, and a footbridge two or three hundred yards farther up the line.

"Let's make for the bridge," said Jarvis; and they accordingly did so.

"Now let's stop a minute," he said, when they were on top of the bridge, and he looked up and down the line. "No train coming—so we can't treat ourselves to a nerve-shocker."

The bridge was well known and highly esteemed by St. Marytr boys for two reasons: first, because the story ran that it had been erected after three haymakers had met their death one night at the level crossing, and secondly, because it afforded a pleasurable test of the steadiness of one's nerves.

When you stood upon it and watched an approaching train, you had, just at the last moment, an extraordinarily powerful illusion that the engine was too big to get through and that you and the whole bridge were going to be smashed into smithereens. Really it was a remarkable illusion; and little boys, treating themselves to the nerve-shocker, had been known to crouch and emit a squeal of terror as the white bath of steam enveloped them and the thunder of the iron mass swept beneath their feet.

"Here," said Jarvis presently, "let's rest our bones here."

A March wind was blowing in a cold bright sky, but its nip was not felt under the cliff of the chalk quarry into which Jarvis conducted his companion; and here, sitting on a pile of timber props, they had a long talk.

"Churchill, I love you for this."

"For what, Jarvis old fellow?"

"For doing what you've done to-day. But don't do it again."

"Why not?"

"It's no use. It only upsets me—makes things harder to bear," and Jarvis began to cough.

"Jarvis!" Edward Churchill laid a hand upon his arm, and kept it there till he ceased coughing.

"You see," said Jarvis, "I always knew that something like this was hanging over me. Father and mother dead—and only my aunt to look to. She always put it before me that the advantages of a good education were all she could promise, and I must therefore work hard at school so as to make my way in the world afterwards."

"Then why didn't you work, Jarvis?"

"I don't know. I ought to have."

Then, talking in just the same fussy hurried way that used to be habitual to him when he gossiped about the captain of the cricket eleven or the matron's sailor cousin, he told Edward Churchill all that could possibly be told about himself from childhood onwards.

"But I couldn't act in harmony with the facts of my true position," he said, when he had reached the present stage of his life history. "I seemed to think that school would go on for ever—and no one more surprised than myself at its ending. Then when the blow fell, and Aunt said she'd settled with Wilson's to start me there on the Monday morning, I made up my mind there was only one way out for me. Yes, Churchill, I made up my mind to commit suicide."

"Jarvis, you can't really mean what you're saying."

"On my word of honour as a gentlemen—" and Jarvis laughed and coughed. "As a *gentleman!* That's funny. How the old words slip out unawares. Rum word for *me* to use nowadays. But I do assure you, Churchill, I did really and truly mean to do it."

"But you don't mean it any longer?"

"No. I soon abandoned the intention."

"Jarvis—dear old fellow—it would have been a very wicked and cowardly act."

"Yes, I see that now; but I didn't see it at first. I thought I'd come out here after dark and do it on the line near the bridge. That's why I chose this direction for our walk. I wanted to have a look."

And then, in the same tone, without any increase of earnestness or solemnity, he said that he had been saved from suicide by religious meditation and thoughts of Christ.

"It came while I was asleep, Churchill. No dream that I could remember, but a sort of message."

"What was the message, Jarvis?"

" 'I carried my cross, and you must carry yours.' An' I mean to do it. Perhaps it won't be for long. I'm not strong—never was. There's something queer with my right hip, as well as the ankle. And, you know, my chest! My famous graveyard cough. It tears me to pieces at night sometimes;" and he smiled. "You bet, the two fellows who sleep in the same room with me don't trouble me for encores."

"You'll let me come and see you pretty often, Jarvis?"

"No. But thank you all the same."

"Let me come once in a way."

"No," said Jarvis. "But, Churchill, what a brick you are! No wonder fellows are fond of you. Of course I'd like to see you—only it's not a bit of good." And he added that soon he would leave St. Dunstan's altogether. He was merely learning the trade in Mitre Street, and after that he was going to a shop at Sittingbourne, a branch of the same establishment. "So you'd best leave me alone. You see, it's no use my hankering after you chaps. If I live, I must settle down to the new level—the common beggars who've never had a chance of learning Latin or Greek. Common! After all, aren't we all one brotherhood? And if you don't like your company, you can always retire into yourself. That's what I do half the time I'm on duty."

They were silent as they walked back to the town, and just before they reached the western gate Jarvis insisted upon saying good-bye.

"Yes, I'd sooner go on by myself now."

"Do let me see you to your door, Jarvis."

"No. Many thanks, Churchill. I shan't forget you, you know."

"And I shan't forget you either."

"Good-bye."

It was really good-bye, because they never spoke to each other again. By Easter Jarvis had disappeared, and the school scandal being over, no one talked of him any more.

Edward Churchill had thought of him frequently, and had written to him several times, but without receiving an answer. Indeed, perhaps it was something in his thoughts about Jarvis that laid the train of other thoughts and made him now as eager for his confirmation as he had previously been anxious to delay it.

Together, then, with twelve other boys from St. Martyr's and innumerable boys from the town, he duly renewed the solemn promise and vow that had been made for him at his baptism, answering audibly "I do" at the proper moment, and thinking throughout the very long ceremony, "All this is but a preparation for what will now happen to me in three days. This is nothing: that is all."

His mother was kneeling and praying among the other mothers, and he would have liked to spend the rest of the day with her, but the newly-confirmed were enjoined to keep together in a kind of sacred good-fellowship until the evening came.

VII

At first gradually, and then with dreadful swiftness, changes came into the quiet home life of Mrs. Churchill and her sons. Tom Churchill was nineteen now, and it was more than time for him to begin his studies at the Theological College; but one night after supper, without preliminary warning, he told his mother that he did not think he was suited for the Church. He felt acute longings for a career of adventure, and, as she couldn't afford to make him a soldier, he fancied he had better go out to the Colonies.

Poor Mrs. Churchill was thunderstruck. "What has put this into your head?" she asked. "You were so sure of yourself. It is some bad influence."

Tom did not answer.

But he shocked Charles, and utterly disgusted Edward, by the explanation he gave to them when Mrs. Churchill's pale sad face was no longer there, to check his tongue.

"What could I say to her without offending her?" he asked bluntly. "For of course this upset—if she chooses to make it an upset—is her fault, not mine."

"How dare you speak of her like that?" said Edward hotly.

"Don't you try to teach me manners," said Tom. "Dash your impudence, who do you think you are?"

"If it's anything against the mater," said Charles, with righteous indignation, "I stand shoulder to shoulder with Edward."

Then Tom laughed in good-humoured contempt. "Look here, my dear innocent babes, I know my duty to the mater just as well as you do, and I am just as fond of her as either of you. But I have reached years of discretion, and things that are still dark to you have become painfully clear to me."

And he went on to say that it was his mother and not he who had chosen the Church as his profession. Any man of the world would have seen with half an eye that he did not show the slightest fitness for the Church. He himself would have seen it, if he hadn't been rendered almost blind, deaf, and dumb by the dear mater's unceasing "pi" talk. Before he had begun to understand what was what, the mater had got to work "pumping religion" into him. She never stopped doing it. Bless her heart, she couldn't help doing so; it was her nature.

"I suppose," he said, with the same horrible bluntness, "there never was anybody quite so much stuffed up with the Church as she is. I admire her for it—only so far as I am concerned, well, my case is: You can take a horse to the water, but you can't always make him drink."

Then there were some warm passages between him and the other two; but he put forward an argument that carried weight. He said that he had a right to speak openly and it was their duty to listen to anything he had to say. He was their senior, he was the eldest son.

"We'll listen," said Edward, "so long as you don't speak disrespectfully of our mother."

"Who wants to speak disrespectfully of her? Not I. God bless her. I know her only thought has been to do what's best for us. But one can't get away from facts. With the best intentions in the world, the dear mater has been trying for I don't know how many years to turn us into the three largest A1 copper-plated prigs that the universe has ever contained."

"The mater *loathes* priggishness."

"Does she?" said Tom drily.

This was terrible to Edward. That Tom should renounce all hope of entering the Church if he did not feel good enough for a priestly life was without doubt the right thing to do; but that he should speak thus of his mother was unforgivable. Here, then, was the brutal conclusion of that beautiful legend. In the fullness of time, one of the weak little children had become strong, big, hardy, able to begin to repay; and this is how he talked of the protector of his weakness.

A week or two passed, and Tom formulated proposals. A St. Martyr's boy called Venables, the son of a New Zealand farmer, was now returning to the Antipodes, and Tom would like to go with him.

Mrs. Churchill refused to hear of it. She said, "Would you put the whole world between us, Tom?"

"Oh, it's nothing nowadays," said Tom cheerfully. "Why, look at Venables—two years younger than me, and he's been there and back three times already. If I make money, you can all come out for your summer holiday."

"I will never consent," said Mrs. Churchill. "When you are of age, you will be your own master; but till then you cannot be so cruel, so unfilial as to defy my authority."

In fact, she felt that her authority had ceased to exist; and this was what others told her. She went about asking advice from everybody—the headmaster, the form masters, the vicar of St. Alban's, and Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Barrett, the auctioneer, was not a person that Edward would have wished his mother to introduce into these most intimate troubles and perplexities. Truly, any snobbishness that perhaps once flourished in a childish mind had long since died. Had it at all survived to a later period, the episode of Jarvis would have been a grand and final uprooting of this noxious weed from the mental garden. Edward did not therefore object to Mr. Barrett because of any caste prejudices, but because the man himself seemed quite unworthy of Mrs. Churchill's countenance and favour.

It was especially distasteful to see him ensconced in a large rocking-chair that had belonged to the late Mr. Churchill, a chair that the boys had been accustomed to consider as an almost sacred piece of furniture, so hallowed was it by sentimental memories.

"Don't go away, Edward," said Mrs. Churchill. He had opened the drawing-room door, and, at the unwelcome sight of Mr. Barrett, was about to close the door again.

"Mr. Barrett takes your view, Edward—that it is much better all this should happen now than later, and that I must not be angry with poor Tom."

"Yes," said Mr. Barrett, "I tell your dear mamma these little accidents will happen in the best regulated families;" and, joining his fat finger tips together, he uttered a string of the tritest possible platitudes. "That is my advice to your dear mamma," he concluded. "We can't any of us afford to see her wearing herself to a shadow with the annoyance of it. No, no. That wouldn't do," and he smiled, and nodded his head. "We also have to remember," and he ceased smiling and turned up his eyes: "The ways of Him who preordains these small rubs and discomfitures are always inscrutable, and we may therefore hope that everything will turn out for the best in the long run."

Whatever one thought of Mr. Barrett, and however much one disliked the manner in which his advice was tendered, its matter was no doubt wise enough. In substance it was what every one said, and Edward among the rest. Very little reflection had shown him his clear and obvious duty. He must, by making open rebellion appear something quite natural to the ordinary course of events, save his mother from grief and sorrow. An actual quarrel between her and Tom must be avoided at all costs.

The quarrel, however, came.

For Tom presently absented himself for a day or two without leave, merely sending a message to say that business affairs had called him to London. When he returned, although he spoke in what purported to be an apologetic tone, he unfortunately gave one an impression of being in fact almost truculently triumphant. Acting on what he considered to be a brilliant idea, he had hunted up their funny old Aunt Jane, and she had consented to act as capitalist at this crisis of his affairs. In other words, she would provide money for sufficient outfit and pay his passage to New Zealand. This arrangement, Tom said, gave him great pleasure, because it would relieve his mother from expense, and she need not worry about things any more. Indeed she might consider the whole thing as finally settled, because he had received a most gratifying letter from Venables senior, offering him employment on a sheep farm immediately after his arrival. But far from sharing the satisfaction of Tom, Mrs. Churchill was bitterly wounded by what he had done. It cut her to the quick to think that he had appealed for assistance to anybody but herself; that he should have done this without her permission, and, above all, that he should have made the unauthorised appeal to Aunt Jane. Since that visit to the Rose Hotel years ago, there had been no further intercourse between the Churchills and their aunt. Auntie had indeed made further overtures of good will, but Mrs. Churchill, actuated by pride that was perhaps not logically defensible, had discouraged them, and now for a long time there had been silence.

With flashing eyes and blazing cheeks, she told Tom that she would never pardon such an act of treachery; that henceforth he might do what he pleased; that it did not matter to her whether he went or stayed, because she felt that she had already lost the son whom she had loved and trusted. And, perhaps for the first time in her life, she banged a door instead of closing it quietly behind her.

Tom looked very sheepish at the sound of this domestic thunder, but he presently whistled and shrugged his shoulders and said, "Of course she doesn't mean it. She'll come round before I go. But now, as the fat seems to be in the fire, the sooner I go the better."

Later on he asked Charles to tell him, as brother to brother, whether he thought that there had really been such monstrous gilt in "biting the ear of old Janie." To which question Charles replied guardedly that he really did not like to pronounce an opinion, but that he honestly felt that Tom was behaving very badly, and sacrificing every one's feelings to his own whims and fancies. The ardour of Tom seemed slightly damped by this reply, but presently rallying, he said it was all a storm in a teacup, and that he thought the world had gone mad to make such a fuss about nothing; he added that he felt it his duty to give both Charles and Edward a faithful report of his visit to Aunt Jane, as it might be useful to them for their future guidance.

"Between you and me and the post," he said, "the old lady didn't welcome me, and I had to return to the charge again and again before I could screw her up to parting point. You never saw such a rummy house or such a queer way of going on. Heaps of pictures and furniture and all that, but the whole place looked beastly dirty. I saw at least half a dozen cats, and she told me that since her dog died she had taken to cats, but they could never make up to her for the loss of Fluffy-face. Her maid—not the one she brought here—seemed to boss the whole show, and to have the old lady completely under her thumb. Anyhow, I persuaded her at last to do the handsome, and she wrote a cheque while the maid was out of the room, and told me to put it in my pocket and say nothing about it. She said, too," and Tom laughed cheerily, "that it was all I need ever expect from her; that none of us had any claim upon her; that all her money was her very own, and that she could do what she liked with it. I tell you this," he said, "for what it's worth. I don't know whether you or Charles have ever built castles in the air, but I often used to think myself that when the old dame turned up her toes, something might come our way."

In the days that followed, home ceased to be home. Tom was busily occupied in his preparations, and Mrs. Churchill rigorously ignored him. She refused to listen to any account of his proceedings. At meal-time she would talk to him only on indifferent subjects, and in the cold manner and tone of a reserved and unbending stranger.

But of course Tom had diagnosed the situation correctly. She did not really mean it. On the last evening that he was to spend under the maternal roof her resolve broke down; she wept upon his shoulder, clinging to him, and calling him her firstborn, begging that they might part as friends, assuring him that she only desired his happiness, and promising to pray for him night after night while he was crossing the waste of waters.

Next morning early she and his brothers went to the railway station to see him off. After he and his friend, young Venables, had got into their compartment in the Dover train, there were more tears and clinging during the pause before the wheels moved and the train began to roll away. Mrs. Churchill, supporting herself on Edward's arm, and still sobbing, waited till the train vanished from sight. Charles stood a few paces from them, and slowly and solemnly waved his pocket handkerchief. He still seemed to be inexpressibly shocked by the whole of this affair.

Tom had gone, and for two months there was comparative peace.

Then Charles, who had recently been growing moodier and moodier, pushed his plate away from him at the supper table, and spoke explosively.

"Tom was right. Tom was right all through. And what's more, I'm not a bit better suited to be a sky-pilot than he was."

Mrs. Churchill rose from her chair with such haste that it fell over. Her lips trembled, and she became so white that Edward sprang to her side, believing that she was about to faint.

"Charles," she gasped, "what do you mean by such blasphemy?"

"I used a wrong word," cried Charles excitedly. "I intended to say clergyman, and I said the other by accident. But, mother, the fact remains. As Tom said, one can't get away from facts. It would be madness—it would be a crime for me to go into the Church. I'm not good—far from it. I should be a slimy hypocrite if I pretended otherwise. I should be a rotter of the deepest dye if I went on with the 'pi' programme any longer."

After this the trouble began all over again, and Charles caused more anguish than had been caused by Tom. Tom, at least, had definite proposals to submit; whereas Charles did not know what he wanted to do, beyond not wanting to be a clergyman. For the second time Edward acted as buffer, struggled to make rough things smooth, pleaded for the rebel and sheltered the deposed ruler. But to Mrs. Churchill it seemed like the solid work of her life going to water before her eyes. It was monstrous and unbelievable—as though a smiling fertile landscape had been devastated by a whirlwind, as though all the pleasant tranquil hillsides had changed to roaring volcanoes, as though evil suffocating fires had burst forth from fields of daisies and cowslips.

The headmaster of St. Martyr's, being again solicited to give his advice, told her that only one thing was certain to his mind—Charles must leave the school. He had suddenly developed unsatisfactory habits; he was becoming a bad example to others; he was "out of hand," and it would be wise to remove him before he committed some flagrant enormity.

"But what then—what am I to do next?" asked Mrs. Churchill. "Can you not help me with suggestions? You have such great knowledge—and I am only an ignorant woman."

The Head, however, was empty of practical hints. Nor did he for a moment appear to think that there was anything unusual or surprising in his confession that a young gentleman who had enjoyed his training for a considerable number of years might finally turn out rather badly.

"Possibly," he said, "a course of strong physical labour—such as may be obtained in, ah, an engineer's works, or, ah, one of these experimental farms one reads of—would dissipate your son's sloth and stimulate his more healthful energies."

While gravely escorting Mrs. Churchill to his front door, he spoke with high approval of Edward, no doubt feeling glad to pay a compliment after giving voice to censure.

"In the opinion of Mr. Jennings—and I may say also in my own opinion, so far as I have had a chance of judging—your third son exhibits very promising mental gifts. His essays, especially, indicate, ah, high imagination, and a great propriety of language. He is painstaking and orderly. If I may say so, he strikes me as obviously being more the material out of which clergymen are made than either of the other two."

"Ah, yes," said Mrs. Churchill, sighing.

"Had you also thought of the Church for him?"

"Yes, constantly—always."

"And he himself?"

"He *thinks* of it—but that is all, so far."

Charles then ceased to be a St. Martyr's boy. He strolled about the town in a perpetual holiday, smoked a meerschaum pipe, made the acquaintance of the barmaid at the Crosier saloon, and became the bosom friend of the marker at Kent's Billiard Rooms. The vicar of St. Alban's told his mother that she should not allow him to stay out so late at night, and Mr. Barrett told her he had been seen talking to some very undesirable companions in the lounge of the music-hall. Lastly, she told herself that his manner of fixedly regarding Maria's niece was not quite nice.

Maria, their still loyal and faithful servant, growing no younger with the passing years, had come to need some slight assistance in the household drudgery, and this young relative had been introduced on probation. She was a black-haired, red-cheeked, untidy girl, very avid for evenings out, and inclined to be sulky to her mistress as well as impudent to her aunt. Mrs. Churchill had already decided that somehow without wounding Maria's feelings, she must be sent back to her parents; and she was more sure than ever when she observed Charles's idle eyes pertinaciously following her.

Alas, neither Maria's nor anybody's else feelings could be spared.

Mrs. Churchill, entering her rarely-used drawing-room at dusk, found Charles in the big swing chair with Maria's niece on his knee. They were gently rocking the chair and whispering to each other dreamily, as though they had already rocked themselves to a kind of beatific waking trance that might now at any moment change to sleep.

"Charles!" said Mrs. Churchill.

Charles, roused from his state of oblivion, made frantic efforts to get rid of his burden and bring the chair to a standstill; and the girl, disengaging herself without haste, put a careless hand to her tumbled black hair, looked impudent, and slipped away downstairs to tell Aunt Maria that she was passionately fond of the young master and would marry him to-morrow if he asked her.

She left for home the same evening. And three or four days afterwards Charles went to London *en route* for Birmingham, in order to begin his studies as an electrical engineer in the workshops of a highly esteemed and go-ahead firm.

It was Mr. Barrett—to whom Mrs. Churchill had turned in her utter despair—who discovered this opening and negotiated all the arrangements for the reception of the pupil, the payment of the premium, and everything else.

"I don't know what I could have done without you," said Mrs. Churchill gratefully.

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Barrett. "There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, if it was in my power."

VIII

Edward and his mother were alone now. A delicious quiet filled their home, and the only trouble was occasional scarcity of money.

Tom, sheep-farming in New Zealand, wrote long letters of which the unvaried gist was: This is a wonderful country; it affords great chances for capitalists, but is rough for working men, and unfortunately life is very expensive. Mrs. Churchill was sending him as an allowance exactly what he would have cost at home, and he never asked for more; but each letter was a long rambling hint that he would like some more.

Charles, too, was a drain upon his mother's slender resources, costing much more than one had hoped. He did not get on well with the Birmingham firm, and another premium was required to establish him at Manchester. Then he moved to Edinburgh. From Edinburgh he launched unusually heavy demands; and Mrs. Churchill, revolting, told Edward, "It isn't fair to you, or to me either. It is like blackmail." The end of the debate, however, was always the same: on Edward's advice, she sent the money. She and he were happy together, and perhaps she secretly thought that, if the absent ones were blackmailers, it was worth paying to be rid of them. Edward reminded her always of their sterling virtues; but truly, though thinking of them with tenderness, he felt that they had become strangers. They had themselves wilfully broken the legend of love.

The most inopportune claim made by Charles was when he found it necessary to visit the electrical works of Lyons and Paris; but once again the money was sent to him—the money that should have taken Mrs. Churchill and Edward for a long summer holiday at a farmhouse in Cornwall.

It did not matter. They were so happy together, anywhere. They told each other that they did not need change of air. St. Dunstan's was sufficiently near the sea. They went out for days in the country, ate their luncheon on the grass, had tea at pretty little roadside cottages; and the people of St. Dunstan's who saw them coming home of an evening said they were more like sweethearts than mother and son.

So the years passed for Edward, with a happiness only disturbed by self-questionings, until he came to be nineteen years of age.

For the last time he had attended the Martyr's Feast as a member of the school. His boyhood was over, but as yet all that makes up the life of men remained uncertain.

One winter's evening, not long after the Celebration of the Feast, he persuaded his mother to come to the service at the cathedral instead of going to her favourite St. Alban's. She went with him readily enough, and to have her by his side added sweetness to the music and softness to the lamps.

Yet presently, when all rose to sing the Magnificat, he forgot that she was there, and it was as if he stood quite alone.

> "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

He was thinking; but the glory of the song, the swell from the great organ, the clustered lights, the grey columns that lifted themselves out of shadow and hid their heads in darkness, the height and vastness of this noble fane, its antiquity and its strength—all these things seemed to have their part as causes of the thrilling emotion that accompanied his thoughts.

It had been twilight when they came in, and the whole fabric of carved and cut stone looked like a rich sepia drawing of a church, with the painted windows faintly tinted by the external light and giving one an impression of ghostliness and mystery, while monuments at a distance gleamed whitely and seemed to whisper of the dead. Now rapidly the twilight deepened; night began to flood the farther parts of the church; the ghostly windows faded, the white tombs vanished, great walls of shadow advanced until the worshippers seemed to be in a little church within the great one. Here, in the transept and choir, where the service was being held, one was conscious every moment of an increasing brightness; colours glowing vividly beneath the circular chandeliers, and the rows of small lights on the choristers' desks flashed and sparkled in front of the boys' faces, deep linen collars, and red neckbands.

Soon the song was over and Edward Churchill knelt, not listening to the well-known words, but lost in meditation.

The inner and the outer life. An existence crowded with incessant and meaningless action would make him the most miserable of human beings—he was, of course, certain of that. He was sure of himself also to this extent: he would infallibly forfeit real happiness if he merely strove for the exaltation that comes from individual success. It would be nothing to him; for instance, to be a great soldier who led armies to conquest and added whole continents to his native land, unless he knew that he had been fighting for an altruistic cause. He thought of all the prizes that the world can ever offer to what are commonly called men of action, and they seemed to him worse than dust and ashes when compared with the peace of mind that is sometimes gained by humbly obliterating oneself for the good of others.

And yet action is inexorably ordained. That marvellous inward stream of imagination, memory, hope, fear, frets and rages against every barrier that shuts it from a seeming issue into the great ocean of material facts. And the necessity of action is constant. Quiet thoughts whose aim is merely quiet change to storms of passion and revolt. Quiet thoughts are rewards, not objects; and restlessness can be banished only by fatigue. We must spend ourselves in action and in thought. We must use every fibre of bodies, exhaust each drop of blood, work till the work kills us, or we do not live to the full. That is the second half of the great enigma. He had been wrong in all his guesses; the bishop-suffragan was wrong; those old philosophers were wrong. For neither the inner life nor the outer life is real. One must live *both,* or one does not live at all. The lying man must still fight life with action, or he will not conquer death with thought.

And his ideas seemed in a moment to crystallise and flash from many facets one splendid gleam of truth.

Christ offered the life of mental peace. Only by following Him could one blend action and thought in a perfect scheme. If one acted as His faithful messenger one would use all one's strength; one would fight and yet rest; and even in hours when the struggle was fiercest, when all that the eye could see was ugly and all that the hand could touch was vile, amidst brutal violence and wanton sin, with the whole external picture changed to a huge kaleidoscope of hell, the stream of one's inward thought would flow deep and still—as a river that glides invisible at night, as a river moving calmly through the darkness to meet the light of dawn.

"Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed;
Teach me to die, that so I may
Rise glorious at the awful day."

Slow waves of melody rolled from the great organ, filling the air with majesty and awe; the chorus of young voices rose sweetly and clearly; each believing heart vibrated in the song of praise.

And Edward Churchill whispered to himself, "This is my call. This is my hour. This is all that I have been humbly waiting for. Poor, weak, and vain as I am, my service is accepted."

He thought of the grandeur of Christ, and of His courage. He was braver than all the warriors the world has ever seen. As highest possible commendation of the heroes and war leaders of history, it is said that when enemies fell into their power, they were lenient; sparing many. But the whole human race were His captives, and He spared them all; for their sake He renounced the use of His infinite power; and when He might have shattered the universe with one word of just anger. He accepted death and torment at the hands of those whom He had come to save. He was the Great Captain, the Hero of Heroes. What other leader should a brave man want to follow?

Throughout the final verse of the hymn, Mrs. Churchill was looking at her son and admiring his profile. He stood very erect, with head well back, his lips shut, and his eyes fixed on the cross above the altar.

Then everybody once more knelt, and soon the blessing was pronounced. The choir and the clergy trooped out slowly, through the open screen, down the nave to the western door. Two stately vergers with lanterns accompanied them; and, as the glow of the lanterns passed on, the vast nave seemed to spring into existence again, to become a magnificent, a fabulous avenue leading far away into the night. At a seemingly immense distance the surpliced group stopped to say the last prayer. No words reached one; it was like an echo of the blessing. There came a faint burst of song, a movement in which the stupendous fabric seemed to join; then the lantern gleams vanished, and all was dark and still.

A light covering of snow lay upon the ground, and as Edward and his mother walked along a narrow swept path the music of the voluntary followed them a little way and kept them silent.

Then, when they had reached the streets and she had taken his arm, he told her that he felt decided at last. He no longer doubted himself. He had heard the call.

Mrs. Churchill could scarcely speak for joy.

"Oh, my son—my true son. Oh, how I have prayed for this! You crown my life with gladness."

And that night she made their supper a feast; telling old Maria that it was a never-to-be-forgotten occasion, that hot dishes were to be cooked and confectionery purchased, that the candles in the chimney sconces were to be lighted as well as all the lamps. She wore her finest dress, put on every one of her poor little ornaments, and looked radiant, grand, and at least ten years younger than before. She treated Edward as though he had been an august, illustrious visitor, bowing with a smile as she took his hand to lead him to the supper table, and saying when he protested, "Do you realise that before long I shall be doing more than bow? I shall have to kneel while you give me your blessing."

And he, lending himself to her humour, ate the unusual dainties, drank wine, and talked lightly, although, perhaps just then a graver kind of festival would have suited him better.

But after their meal they talked more seriously, and on his side with a deepening sense of joy. That evening his whole future was mapped out. The difficulty of ways and means governed all their plans, and, indeed, little choice of detail seemed possible. He would be ordained without any avoidable delay, but in the four years that must intervene he would try to be self-supporting. He would teach, write, somehow earn some money; and, although they might necessarily be separated for short periods, he would come back here each time that he could. Then as soon as possible they would be united for ever. It was a hard life that he traced so cheerfully; seeing himself in imagination the vicar of some overcrowded London parish, who might remain poor and obscure to the end of the chapter. But he and she would be together, and they would be very happy.

"That's a promise, mother, isn't it? You won't mind leaving St. Dunstan's?"

"No."

"And you'll stay with me always?"

"Yes," and, smiling, she spoke rather sadly. "I'll stay until you have a wife to look after you instead of a mother."

"I shall never marry."

"Oh, that would be unnatural. *I* could not wish for that —greedy as I am for all your love."

But he told her that a priest did not need a wife. "Priests should be celibates. I have always admired the Roman rule of celibacy."

Mrs. Churchill shook her head. "No, marriage is a holy and beautiful ordinance. A happy marriage can even raise a priest."

"Mother, believe me. I want no one but you."

He had no dreams to-night. Directly he lay down in his bed, where so often the nights had been more tiring than the days, where as a child he had seen visions and heard voices, where he had felt the pain of others so keenly that it seemed his own, he sank into deep, untroubled sleep.

IX

He was roused next morning by his mother knocking at the door. The post had brought her a summons to London, and she wanted him to come with her. He must dress and get some breakfast at once, and they would catch an early train.

She appeared nervous and fluttered, but as she offered no further explanation he did not question her. As they hurried to the railway station, she told him breathlessly that she had in fact been much agitated by the receipt of unexpected news. As always happens on these occasions, they had time to spare at the station, and while waiting on the platform she informed him that the principal part of the tidings related to their Aunt Jane.

"Edward, she is dead. Her solicitors have written to me, saying she died a week ago. That is not all—but we are to go and see them. Messrs. Joyce & Burdett—in Gray's Inn. They speak of legacies. Oh, I can't say more. But I hope. I hope. I am in a fever to know the truth."

There were other people in their compartment, and she was silent all the way to London.

At the solicitors' offices they were told that Mr. Joyce would see them at once in his own room, but nevertheless they were kept waiting in an outer apartment for a period that to Mrs. Churchill seemed endless. Then at last, after some compliments and civilities unendurably spun out, they were seated in front of Mr. Joyce's writing-table listening to the words that might change the whole current of their lives.

"As I had the pleasure of advising you," said Mr. Joyce, "the residue of the property is left in equal shares to your three sons, Thomas, Charles, and Edward."

Mrs. Churchill was trembling so that she had difficulty in asking her one great question. What did this mean exactly? How much money or how little was coming to her three boys? "Please, don't keep me in suspense."

Mr. Joyce, a genial old fellow, laughed good-humouredly. "Well, my dear madam, it is not El Dorado; but it is a nice, comfortable sum for young gentlemen beginning life. Roughly, each share should bring in an income of six hundred a year—perhaps a little over."

And he explained that the capital sum would be handed over to each of the young gentlemen on attaining his majority. But meantime the executors were empowered to pay out income for maintenance, education, and advancement.

"As you know, Mrs. Churchill, your relative was not exactly like everybody else. I say it in no disrespect—no, certainly not—but she was *odd*—especially of late. I mention it merely for this reason. I do not think you need apprehend any trouble on that scorce—on the validity of the will. I thought you would be glad to know it. Yes, I think I can safely assure you that everything is in order."

And he went on to say that the will, drafted by himself, had been executed several years ago, and that quite recently a codicil had been added.

"Yes," and he laughed again, "substantial provision was then made for a servant, and for the guardianship and adequate support of certain *cats*—nine cats—for the remainder of their days. I dare say those cats may not live as long as the testator hoped—for the capital devoted to their endowment does not return to the estate, but passes to their guardian. Well, I welcomed that codicil—for this reason. From the legal point of view, it tended to strengthen the will. Do you see, it not only brought the will up-to-date, it also——"

For a little while neither Mrs. Churchill nor Edward found it possible to listen with attention. They were entirely engrossed by rapid and quite uncontrollable thoughts.

Edward's first feeling was one of sorrow—sorrow for the queer, kind old woman who had died. He saw her in imagination as he had seen her at the St. Dunstan's hotel, jingling trinkets, chattering, fussing, tripping on her velvet dress, and fondling the little dog. She was kind and generous. Why might she not enjoy a little longer the strange, confused dream that her life had probably become? Then immediately he was thinking, Why had she not died sooner? If the money had come sooner, Tom need not have gone to rough it as a farmer. Charles, too—Charles could have been started on a prosperous course. Tom would come racing home to claim his own—he was already of age. But it was too late for him to go into the Army. If the money had come sooner, he and Charles could have done what they liked.

And then, swift and unintelligible as lightning in a cloudless sky, he had a totally illogical thought about himself. "Has the money come too late for me also? If I had known of it, I could have done what *I* liked." But immediately he recognised the folly of this reflection. "Why did I think that?" he asked himself. "For I *am* doing what I like. The money could have made no difference. Indeed, in my case it has come at the very moment, the first moment, I wanted it."

Mrs. Churchill's thoughts were more completely jubilant.

"'By the way, which of the three are you?"

Mrs. Churchill and Edward both roused themselves to answer this direct question.

"The youngest? Really? And how old, may I ask?"

"A little over nineteen."

"You surprise me. I should have guessed your age as more;" and Mr. Joyce looked at Edward with a studious and kindly interest. "Yes, you look—to my eye—considerably older."

"He does," said Mrs. Churchill, fondly. "Everybody says so. It is his strength of character."

"I am glad to hear that," said Mr. Joyce genially; "because strength of character is an uncommonly useful thing; and, if I may take the liberty of speaking with frankness, you and your brothers may need it just now."

Then he offered Edward the wise advice that, as he explained, he would give to a son of his own if analogously situated.

"For *your* sakes, I am inclined to wish that it had been left in trust for you—yes, I do. You see, the danger is that young men not accustomed to manage money are apt to fancy that six hundred a year is inexhaustible. But not at all. Nothing of the sort. It is not nearly enough to live on in idlessness. But mark this"—and he became impressive. "It is a golden key to almost any career you please to choose. That is what you should keep before you: This will be magnificent odds in my favour—this lifts me above the struggle that crushes the hearts out of so many able men. I can work in comfort—I can afford to bide my time, if the work is not immediately remunerative. It opens the world to me."

"Yes," said Mrs. Churchill fervently. "That is what I felt at once."

"And," asked Mr. Joyce, "have you as yet formed any plans?"

Edward replied that he was going into the Church.

"Yes," said his mother, "he is going into the Church."

"The Church!" echoed Mr. Joyce. "Oh. Well, as you're still so young, you have ample leisure. I should not finally make up my mind too soon."

"It is quite made up," said Edward.

"But you may change it."

"That is not likely."

As he said this, Edward had a vivid memory of his benefactress as she came forward welcoming them in the hotel room. Then he understood why he had thought of her again so suddenly. She also had advised him to be careful about making up his mind. And he *had* been careful. He had waited until he felt the call.

"Well, if it is to be the Church," continued Mr. Joyce, "independent means is everything there too. Starting with six hundred a year, you ought to be a bishop before you're fifty. I should keep that before myself. I should say resolutely: With six hundred a year to help me along, if I don't become a bishop—at the least—I shall have failed."

Then they talked a little business, and after that Mr. Joyce bade them good-bye.

"One last word, Mr. Churchill. Never, on any pretence, touch your capital. Consider it as a trust—to pass on intact. Make it a trust in your own mind, since my late client didn't do it for you."

They walked away together through the crowded streets, not knowing whither they directed their steps, and not really caring. The sun shone upon them: all the world seemed bright and gay and full of hope.

Mrs. Churchill felt an almost irresistible desire to spend some money at once, in order to prove that the wonderful change of fortune was real and not imaginary. An hour ago cab fares were matters of great importance; now walking instead of driving was a whim, an eccentricity, or an amiable condescension on their part. Since the boys were opulent personages, they would want no money from her, and so she had become as rich as they. But it was solely for them that in truth she rejoiced and above all—oh, infinitely above all—she rejoiced for Edward. She kept squeezing his arm, and murmuring. "Edward, do you even now see what it means to you?"

"Yes, yes," he answered from time to time. He was asking himself, "Why am I so glad? Surely I ought to feel that it is nothing to me? Why should I be puffed up with this vainglory?"

In spite of their affluent circumstances, they had a frugal, inexpensive luncheon, and they travelled back on the railway, as they had come, third-class. But on the return journey they obtained a compartment to themselves, and this was just as satisfactory as if they had taken a special train and sat in a richly upholstered saloon.

They sat side by side, he looking out of the window, watching the trim landscape rush towards him and drop behind, like a thing that one carelessly uses a moment, then throws away and forgets; and she with her hands clasped on his shoulder, looking up at his face, and talking with the almost passionate admiration of a silly girl for the strong silent man she loves.

"My darling, I glory in it. My dreams have come true. In all my rejoicing yesterday there was just that drop of bitterness—what every mother would feel, but no one quite so much as I. Do you understand? It made my heart ache —even while you talked so bravely—that you would not have what is given to so many: a grand and stately preparation—the university—foreign tours. And I thought: He will be obliged to stint himself in garments, food, and lodging; he will be unable to pick and choose his curacies; he will always be driven by necessity to take what other men leave;" and she raised herself to touch his chin with her lips. "But now—*now* you can have all. You shall be surrounded with beautiful things—the frame shall be worthy of the picture. And all things will be easy for you—as Mr. Joyce said. You shall be a Prince of the Church—and as a very, very old woman, I will come and receive your blessing on the cathedral steps. And people will say, 'Who was it that the Archbishop spoke to so gently?' And some one will answer, 'It was his mother. . . .' Oh, my boy—my own idolised boy, I'm so happy;" and resting her forehead on her hands, she burst into tears.

He kissed and soothed her, holding her close to his heart, as the train sped onward and the river, the shipping, and the castle of Rochester swung into view. She was passive in the delight of his embrace for a little while, then released herself and sat silent by his side. But it seemed as if her emotion and excitement had been flowing out of her into him.

His eyes brightened and he drew deep breaths.

Was she right to rejoice so greatly? Had he been timid and lacking in faith when he fancied that his own elation was vainglory? It seemed to him now, with the echo of her fond words still sounding in his ears, that veritably this money had come to him by divine design immediately upon his vowing himself to Christ. He felt a thrill of immense pride. The money implied that he was going to be used for more delicate work than he had dared hope. Not only was he chosen, but chosen for special purposes. He was not merely to be one of the rank and file: he was to be a leader.

And he, too, thought of a splendid preparation for his splendid task. University training! Yes, he must go to Oxford, and stay there as long as possible. A priest should not be too young. Entire freedom from hurry, intercourse with polished intelligences, the opportunity of studying at one's ease men as well as books—all this he might enjoy without fear, because it was appointed.

His ambition widened every moment. That dream of the humdrum toil of crowded parishes seemed to be gone forever; he must fit himself for the world-arena; he must learn to walk with dignity and confidence in palaces as well as in cottages; he must make himself an influence and force.

That was what the money meant to him. In this sense it was a trust—a sacred trust. After his preparation he could deal with the money more freely. Even if he used much of it for others, there would always be more than enough left for himself.

And he thought of a claim upon his trust fund that must be satisfied at once. For the rest of the journey he strenuously considered this first claim, making arithmetical calculations in regard to incomes. He thought, "Six hundred a year is almost twelve pounds a week. That is preposterously too much for any one man. It is exactly six times as much as is necessary. With two pounds a week, even a man who was not capable of work would live in comfort and ease. I myself should never need more, for myself. Why, whole families often have less, and yet get along all right. If now I have ten pounds a week instead of twelve pounds, I can never know the difference." And he determined that he would spend two pounds a week on some one else; he would secure it to that other person absolutely; as soon as possible he would break into his capital to this extent.

X

Next day, while Mrs. Churchill was telling the wonderful news to her friends and receiving their congratulations, Edward went over to Sittingbourne to pay a call at a china shop.

Common and ugly as was Wilson's establishment at St. Dunstan's, this Sittingbourne branch was worse—truly a wretched place, dark, stuffy, with scarce space for the humble customers to move among the piles of cheap crockery.

"Can I see Mr. Jarvis?" asked Edward.

"What Mr. Jarvis?"

"An assistant here."

"Oh, well," and the shopkeeper looked hard at Edward. "He *was* an assistant here. That's true enough. Were you a friend of his?"

"Yes, a great friend."

The shopkeeper seemed to search for appropriate words before he said sympathetically, "Then, being a great friend, how is it you don't know he's been dead better part of two years?"

The money had come too late for Jarvis.

Edward Churchill stayed in Sittingbourne till nightfall. He went to the cemetery where his dead friend lay buried, but sought vainly for the grave. A sexton at last showed him the spot. There was nothing to mark it—not a trace of decayed flowers, not a rusted strand of wire, to say that wreaths and crosses had ever been laid above the sleeping head.

"But it's here or hereabouts," said the sexton, "and there'll be no difficulty in locating it to an inch. I've only to get the plan and the number, you know. And if, as you say, you're wishing to put up a monument, why, come straight along with me now. I don't know if there's any firm you regularly patronise; but, if not, can safely recommend Banks in Station Road. See that marble cross? It came from Banks's. You can examine it as a sample of what they turn out. And I've never heard their prices are excessive."

Edward Churchill finished his business with the sexton and the stonemasons, wandered about the town making many inquiries, and quite late succeeded in obtaining an interview with a clergyman who had known Jarvis well. He could not have gone home without seeing this man. He felt an imperative necessity to learn how Jarvis died.

"I fear I have kept you a long time," said Mr. Merrick, as he entered the dull, cheerless room where his visitor had been patiently waiting for nearly an hour. "Please be seated."

He was an old, white-haired man with a thin face and shaky hands, but directly Edward Churchill heard his voice he knew that he was a faithful servant of God.

"Pray tell me how I can serve you, Mr. Churchill."

Then, after saying that he and Jarvis had been school friends, Edward asked those questions to which, as it proved, Mr. Merrick was able to give the ardently desired answers.

Mr. Merrick had been with Jarvis several times before the end, and at the end.

"And he received the consolation of the Church?"

"Yes, I administered the Sacrament for the last time only a little while before he died."

"And you say you don't think he suffered much physically?"

"I think he suffered very little, scarcely at all."

"And in his mind? He was calm—quite prepared?"

"Oh, yes."

"His faith never wavered? He died in full belief?"

"It was a beautiful death—perhaps the most beautiful death I ever witnessed."

"Thank you, Mr. Merrick," and Edward got up from his chair. "It is most kind of you to have let me see you. But I know perfectly well that I need not apologise for troubling you. I had a great respect and admiration for Jarvis—and you will understand my regret. Truly I am so sorry—so bitterly sorry for him."

"Don't be sorry," said the old man, shaking hands with Edward. "Why should you be sorry for him? Be glad—be very glad."

As he said this, his eyes glowed and his voice seemed to strengthen; indeed for a moment his whole aspect changed, and one thought instinctively that only a few years ago he had been a man in the prime of life, robust, vigorous, able to bear fatigues and hardships. Next moment the light faded out of his eyes, and, as he came shuffling through the hall to the outer door, he was a feeble, worn-out old man.

"Good-bye, Mr. Churchill."

"Good-bye, sir."

And Edward went away thinking, "Yes, one should rejoice rather than grieve." But nevertheless sorrow remained with him.

Thy will be done.

During the fully occupied weeks that followed he ceased to think of his friend with such poignant regret. He and his mother were continuously busy. Together they spent nearly a fortnight at Oxford, making all arrangements for his collegiate career. He was to go to a really good college, to have handsome, spacious rooms, to buy books, furniture, and ornaments, on a liberal scale of expenditure. Mrs. Churchill insisted upon all these matters, and indeed took them out of his control entirely.

And so the time slipped by until the day came for him to leave St. Dunstan's and go into residence at the University. That morning he felt both elation and sadness. He was breaking away from his mother's home; he was turning his back on the ancient city that had sheltered his youth. He would return again and again and again, but perhaps St. Dunstan's would never seem to him quite the same.

As he and Mrs. Churchill drove to the station, he looked with loving, grateful eyes at the familiar streets and dear old houses. It was a fine spring day, with every open space full of strong light, and each shadow falling dark and firm. The market looked like a garden of many colours; and next minute all the gaiety, noise, and crowd had changed to solemn peacefulness, as they passed beneath medieval walls and narrow barred windows, and heard a faint bell-music whisper in the air; and never till now had the spell exercised by the whole place seemed so gently soothing and so invincibly strong.

Even at the railway station he could feel it lingering, holding. Only when he had waved his last good-bye, and the train was bearing him away more swiftly every moment, could he cease to feel it or think of it.

But no, the spell was not quite broken yet. Looking out from his corner seat, he saw the city once more. How small it appeared at this distance—just a patch of buildings in the waste of chalky slope and marshy plain, with its medley of roofs mysteriously softened instead of illuminated by the sunlight, and the three towers seeming to swim in a golden mist.

"Small as it looks," thought Edward Churchill, "it is great and must ever be great to an Englishman's heart. To England, to all the western world, it is Christ's own metropolis, His court and palace, the inviolate home that we built for Him with our hands."

And the full force of the spell was upon him for a little while, even after the place itself had vanished.

XI

Edward Churchill passed five years at Oxford, and throughout this time his confidence in himself was increasing, his faith solidifying, and his ambition becoming more definite. He was young, strong, with almost perfect physical health, and he believed that he was authorised to enjoy to the full every innocent pleasure that offered itself—that is, if never for a single hour he forgot the solemn character of the task for which all this was a preparation. And truly he never did forget.

Here in the wider sphere of University life, as in the small world of school, he became popular. It was the same gradual progress of increasing regard given to him without effort or solicitation on his part. The dons liked him. The college servants liked him. A constantly recruited army of undergraduates liked him.

Little by little he grew to be a personage of established position, a man of many friends, who belonged to no particular set, but who passed freely through all the invisible barriers of social existence, by no means a great 'varsity light, but a quiet, unostentatious wielder of considerable influence. He himself was but very vaguely aware that he exercised any influence at all; but he was quite conscious of the kindly feeling that so many people showed him, and he welcomed the obvious fact with delight, thinking, "This is a good sign. The power to win friendship or trust is what may prove of great value when I begin my appointed work."

He had written in his diary, as a guiding note—

> *"A priest should be able to imagine all that others can feel, to be acquainted with all that they can know, to forgive all that they can do."*

More and more surely he felt himself reserved for grand and important things. Perhaps—who knows?—even his mother's dreams would come true. Everything at Oxford fostered the largeness of ambition. It was the ancient storehouse of intellectual force; every stone whispered of ecclesiastical pomp; the spirit of the place was aristocratic.

During his third year he deliberately abandoned any chance of securing a high place in the Honours List.

He felt the necessity of a wider range of reading. He studied biology, psychology, natural science. A priest should not be afraid of "scientific truths," as they are so pompously called. A priest should know as soon as possible all that can be said against the real, living, imperishable truth that it is his proud duty to expound and maintain. To this end, also, he read not only all the most famous attacks on the validity of the historical evidence supporting the Christian faith, but the critical works of avowed atheists.

Nothing that he read thus of set purpose moved him to anything stronger than a faint contemptuous wonder that men of powerful intellect, men trained in logic, should so pitifully fail. The whole arguments of the materialists, especially when supporting their disbelief in the immortality of the soul, even in the existence of the soul, struck him as peculiarly childish and absurd. Truly he felt sorry for such people, saying in regard to revealed religion, "I can accept nothing that you do not prove to me. I can only advance in my belief step by step, after assuring myself that at every step I stand on solid ground;" and wilfully—no, not wilfully, but blindly and insanely—ignoring the fact that their entire life in regard to matters other than religion was composed of thousands of unquestioning beliefs, of acceptances from moment to moment of the unproved and the unprovable.

Poor little people, who might have been big, but of their own free will choose to be small; who, as heirs to the splendid heritage of a universe, renounce their succession, and say, "This glimpse of daylight is all I ask, this bit of earth which seems my birthplace I claim as my tomb, this dim dream of trouble I hold and cherish, and cannot barter against the unfolding pageant of eternity."

But just as he felt a sorrowful contempt for the folly of those who try to trace bounds to the infinite with a yard measure that is marked off to the tiny scale of inductive reasoning, he was sometimes filled with admiration of their patient research and the ingenious devices of experimental investigation. Above all, he admired the courage of men who had devoted what they thought was their all—this earthly life—to examination of the human brain. Failing, these said that failure was inevitable. It is in the nature of things. Mind, according to them, is a function of the brain. But thought and consciousness must ever remain inexplicable.

And he thought, "No, one day we may know that also. But the knowledge will flash into us from what these men call the great void, and we shall recognise then, by 'the irrefutable logic of facts,' that all we have prized and cherished as the best of ourselves is outside us and not inside us. Our brains are not apparatus that create thought, but as yet imperfect instruments that impede thought. Thought, as we know it, is a poor thing, yes. But the essence of thought, the vital unchanging principle of our finite intelligences, comes pouring through starlit immensity to fill us with the potentialities of glory and force. In that sense there is no end nor beginning to human thought."

All this seemed to Edward Churchill obvious and indestructible. The doubt of others confirmed his own convictions. And he recognised the peculiar strength and virtue of faith, by the beam of light, the bright dissolving ray, that he, a humble but faithful believer, could cast upon the dark confusion that had been left by the strenuous labours of some of the greatest minds of the age.

Although his study of modern philosophy left him emotionally calm, it was the stimulus that set him writing. He had for a long time been making copious notes, and now he attempted, as a regular exercise, to give expression to his reflections or criticism. The guiding note in his diary was a quotation from a treatise on psychology: "Be very doubtful of the value of any of your thoughts unless you can express it in explicit language;" and, guided by this severe advice, he wrestled resolutely with the vagaries of a too exuberant pen. Graces of diction, rhythm of construction, and style, were to be of no account. One must say what one had to say simply and forcibly: if one couldn't do so, the inference was that one really had nothing to say that was worth saying.

Thus he wrote a series of essays linked together with the main idea and purpose of utterly demolishing all those blind and deaf scientists, their specious arguments and faulty logic. He called them *Builders on Sand,* and thought that one day he might publish a book with this title, or perhaps only use his manuscript materials for sermons. At any rate, he had no intention of publishing anything at present. The writing was merely an exercise.

A pleasant and most engrossing exercise—the hours that he spent sitting with sported oak, hammering hard at his main idea, squeezing it till it distilled itself in little rivulets of ink, were altogether happy. Young men would beat upon the door, shout, and laugh; but presently his eyes returned to the paper, and soon he did not hear a sound. Or when he stood at his window, manuscript in hand, they called up to him. "Churchill, you villain. You were there all the time. Come down." He smiled and nodded his head to them, for a few moments saw them, joyous and frank and kind, with sunlight on their faces; he noticed the peaceful beauty of the court, with its mellow red buildings, a spire rising above the further roofs and black slow-flying rooks in the sky—and then after another moment he ceased to see anything. That main idea had resumed its dominion; it was clamouring to be expressed explicitly.

In his fourth year the writing habit had become so strong that he determined that it was time to break it. But, before bidding adieu to the attractions of foolscap paper, he could not resist the temptation of testing in a practical manner the value of what he had so far done. Taking, therefore, his notes as a foundation, he completed two or three articles and sent them to the editors of London reviews. To his great pleasure one of these contributions was immediately accepted by the editor of the *Nineteenth Century,* and in the course of a few months he saw himself in print. A further pleasure was given him by the receipt of three or four letters from strangers who had read his article and approved of the opinions that it contained. The college dons also talked about it, and for a little while he enjoyed the gratifying sensations of a successful author. Then, just when he was forgetting all about the matter, he received a final and astounding letter from some one to whom he had never spoken, but who yet was not altogether a stranger. He could scarcely believe his eyes when he opened the envelope and read the address—*Lambeth Palace.* Those two words made him thrill with excitement.

"My dear sir," the letter began, "I have been very much struck with the arguments for toleration which you so ably put forward in your article, 'Ritual and Symbolism' in the *Nineteenth Century* for July. It has only now been brought to my notice, and I take the liberty of writing directly to you." And his Grace, taking it for granted that the writer of the article was a man of considerable experience in Church discipline, went on to recite some of his own difficulties as head of a not too obedient priesthood.

Edward Churchill replied to this letter, telling the Archbishop that he was a St. Martyr's boy; and in due course he received a second letter, in which his Grace said that he would be glad to make his acquaintance should Mr. Churchill be ever able to make an opportunity of going as far as Lambeth.

Trifling as was this little incident, it was accepted by Edward as another omen of future grandeurs. It seemed to him a wonderful and splendid thing that he should have thus brought himself into touch with the Primate. He showed the letter to his mother and to no one else; and to her it seemed like a definite promise of rapid advancement. As Edward folded and unfolded the treasured document, she seemed to hear the delicate rustle of the lawn sleeves that he would one day wear.

That year they spent the Long Vacation on the Continent, and really their tour was one long day-dream. Day after day they talked of the gracious, dignified life that they would lead together, as Edward rose from rank to rank in the hierarchy of the Church.

It was rather a blow to her when he told her he had made up his mind that, after all, that phase of work in a poor and crowded parish must not be dropped out of the scheme altogether. He considered it necessary. But now it would merely be a further period of training—another opportunity of studying human nature—a period in which he could practise the art of preaching. Of course he would not stop in humble or obscure surroundings a minute longer than might be needed for his higher purposes. He would go into the realm of cultivated people as soon as possible, and then without an hour's delay he would provide a home for his mother as well as for himself.

More and more she seemed to look to him as the wellspring of all her joy. Indeed, pour soul, she had no other source from which she could extract any comfort. Her two other sons provided her with nothing but disappointment and anxiety. Except for Edward, all the money seemed worse than useless—a cause of absolute distress. Thomas Churchill, instead of coming home, had remained in Australasia, wandering about those vast territories, squandering his substance in stupid speculations, and, as she feared, indulging in far from reputable amusements. She gathered from guarded statements in his letters that he had a female companion with him on these wanderings, and that if he had not already married this person, he really ought to have done so. Charles Churchill, without any shilly-shally, had made a most imprudent marriage, allying himself with a music-hall artist of worse than doubtful reputation. He had said himself that, since his mother could not approve of the marriage, he preferred not to introduce his wife to the family circle.

Talking of these unhappy entanglements, Mrs. Churchill often told Edward that they had made her very desirous of seeing him suitably married in due course. She said that when the time came and he found a really nice good wife, she would welcome her with ardent delight, not only as a daughter, but as a safeguard against the possibility of accidents. In fact, she harped on this talk about his marriage in a way that became painful to him. The idea coming from her seemed strange and unnatural. Were they not all in all to each other? He understood that his mother, in talking thus, proved the depth and purity of her unselfishness, but somehow it jarred upon him; he could not quite understand it.

"But, Edward," she said, "you will fall in love one day. It cannot be otherwise; love is a divine law."

And he thought, "Yes, but not *that* kind of love."

Indeed, he had reached his present age without the faintest awakening of those normal instincts that usually have such tremendous power, in spite of their vagueness, during adolescence and early manhood. In regard to the other sex, his thoughts and his feelings remained almost exactly what they had been when he was a boy of twelve. In those days he had admired little girls at juvenile parties for their slenderness and grace and silky hair and pretty frocks. But he had never cared for dancing with them; and in anything like a game they were simply a nuisance, by reason of their incompetence and feebleness. He could not be bothered with them. Considered merely from the point of view of their weakness, they did arouse a sort of chivalrous impulse—a dim idea that if, for instance, they fell into water, one would dive in and rescue them; but as soon as one had fetched them out and handed them over to their stupid and inattentive guardians, one would say "Good afternoon," and never see them again. Now, as then, in spite of his strong sense of beauty, the living presentment of matured feminine charms filled him with distaste. Standing by his mother's side in these foreign picture galleries, he could admire and feel something like reverential awe at the perfect symmetry, the life-like flesh tints, the sweeping curves of the antique nude, but all such pleasure was entirely intellectual; interest in the age of the picture, thoughts of the patient painter whose hand had grown cold and stiff hundreds of years ago, mingled with the appreciation of a piece of art, and perhaps as an essential factor in this pleasure lay the fact that what he gazed at was not alive and real, but merely a coloured shadow upon a wall. If he turned from the lifeless picture to some young and good-looking woman at a few yards distance, the sight of this live modern nymph immediately evoked a faint revulsion of thought. The rounded solid forms of life, draped in costly fashionable garments, were vulgar, disenchanting, almost gross.

Towards the end of his last year at Oxford he took to writing again, but now it was on a different plan. A conversation with his tutor had driven him back to psychology, and, after reading some of the most recently published books of the Continental and American schools, he found himself compelled to change his own instinctive views upon the mystery of consciousness. Why? Only a year and a half had passed since he was so absolutely firm in his stock of broad ideas, and so confident in the solidity of their logical sequence. Now he suddenly became aware of disconnected links, confusions, partial if not general fogginess. Then he thought, "I have been reading too much—I have been absorbing too readily." Diffusive reading is perhaps always destructive to individual originality, and he began instinctively to dread the thought of others, as killing one's own thought. Perhaps already he knew enough for his purpose; he had made a wide foundation, he must begin now to build for himself, or he would never do so. And he determined that henceforth, except in regard to specialised work, such as his theology, he would read only for recreation and not for the purpose of opening his mind.

It is better to make one's own discoveries, even though they prove to be as old as the hills. Setting himself, therefore, the most difficult of all tasks—to think for one's self—he tried to put down on paper a plain statement of his belief in regard to the soul, the mind, and the human brain, and he found that he could not do it. Tested by that standard, the possibility of explicit expression, his thoughts were too vague—his thoughts were of no value.

Day after day, he struggled to express what he felt most strongly, even if he could not translate his feelings into set terms of belief; but here again he failed, and failed in a curious manner. For now each time that he turned to spiritual explanations, material facts suggested themselves vividly, and when he started from the basis of matter the overwhelming claims of spirit asserted themselves.

But he could think allegorically and find ready words, a hundred rapid turns of phrase, so long as he did not attempt to combine the two methods of explanation.

At last he accepted his inability, and said "It is of no moment. I will take mental sensation as I find it, and be content with the certainties of faith."

Then he became comfortable, and he left his notes inconsecutive or broken as they fell upon the paper.

Meditating on the ceaseless activity of thought—or consciousness—that goes with us almost from the cradle to the grave, he said to himself, "Only in its restlessness can it ever truly seem a reflection or even a parallel progress with the incessant motions, the modecular readjustments of our brain-material. But doubtless the entire substance of our bodies is drawn upon to support this almost merciless activity of the inner unappeasable self—the something that knows no real respite even in sleep, that is at once a passive spectator and an active controller, that makes the thought-pictures which it sees and yet suffers because the subjects of the pictures bring torment and despair more often than peace and hope."

At this point he felt the break in the sequence of his ideas; and he began to think of the soul as a lamp which burns bright and clear, illuminating the mirror which is the mind—and for perfect peace the mirror should show nothing but the steady flame of the contented soul. And thinking again of the ugly pictures that are memories, coming unbidden, not to be driven away, shown to us by the mirror whether we will or no, and causing a sickness of dissatisfaction with self, he said, "Yes, I know that this at least is true." Then, as if automatically, his pen made a note—

> "And God means men to realise the necessity of goodness—teaches them by mirror and lamp."

He thought, "Perhaps wicked men, sunk in sensual vice, have veiled the mirror with encrusted dirt, so that they see no glimmer of the lamp. But probably not. Glimpses of light they still have: sufficient to make them suffer transient remorse." Then he wrote another note—

> "Or the flame of the lamp may burn low and dim in its thought-cavern, and all may seem smoky and obscure when the thoughts are bad, unhappy, foolish. But happy, innocent thought feeds the flame, and the breath of the flame is thought-vapour that rises, and can rise as high as heaven—a fragrant incense for the throne of grace."

He went back to theological studies, and left his notes untouched; but out of them there had come, most strongly, that image of the mirror and the lamp—an image that presented itself again and again, until he came to use it as a thought-token or symbol always, saying to himself: "It shall be my guide, and I will trust to none other. Whether I stand or fall, I will live by the Mirror and the Lamp."

XII

With some of it on the south and more of it on the north of the great main thoroughfare that connects Aldgate and the East India Docks, St. Bede's at this period of its history was perhaps the poorest and most miserable parish in the East End of London. Close-packed, crushed by the buttressed height of railway viaducts, rendered airless by huge walls of factories, it at once banished lively interest from a stranger's mind and left only a dull oppression of the spirit. It was forlorn without being tragic, hideous and yet not thrillingly terrific; it had no salient features; it was not picturesque like Limehouse, not maritime like Poplar; there was none of the gaiety and squabbling good-fellowship of Jewish districts; there came into it no colour or relief from strangely garbed Asiatics. Dusty and grey in sunshine, black and sinister at twilight, it seemed to be the place of work without hope, vice without joy, pain that has become so much a habit that it is no longer felt.

If those who knew the parish best had desired to claim for it a single distinguishing characteristic, they would probably have put forward the attribute of unusual noise. Generally the sounds of the East End are mechanically produced—the rattle of trams, the murmur of moving wheels, the scroop and jar of swing bridges opening and shutting, the fussy clamour of steam cranes; but, except in the big streets, people do not themselves contribute largely to the babel. They go about their work, never as elsewhere stopping to stare or lingering to wonder. There is neither idleness nor curiosity. But in St. Bede's the racket of mechanism seemed all day long to concentrate itself, and at dark the human voice grew loud in meaningless chorus.

And from various causes the home of religion appeared to be the very heart or focal point of St. Bede's noisiness. The church, the vicarage, and dependent buildings, had for companions a ginger beer manufactory and a tobacco warehouse; the board schools were close by; the railway line sprang slantingly from pier to pier, flung its arches or girders above top windows, and divided the immense chimney towers. The streets here were paved with stone, so that the clatter of wagon horses aided the thunder of passing trains; fifty sorry little shops made a commercial centre, and at nightfall costers regularly wheeled in their barrows, stationed themselves at immemorial pitches, filling the roadway, forming a lamplit market from kerb to kerb.

Inside the vicarage one had almost the same amount of noise as outside, but with a local and individual atmosphere of confusion as well. From the roof-tree to the basement boards, its inmates, except when asleep, were always busy, always trying to do more than was humanly possible, knowing that it was so and yet still trying. Only after repeatedly frustrated attempts could the vicar, his wife, or the two resident curates sit down to eat, to read, to write; and, when seated, no one was ever comfortable; each was waiting to be made to get up again.

Mr. Walsden, the vicar, was a short, square man of about sixty; an eager, quick-moving, plain-speaking man; a shrewd, kindly, brave creature, but not at all intellectual, and quite devoid of poetry or romance. The only beautiful thing in his life was his faith, which had mingling with it a missionary spirit that burned undimmed. He was worldly only in his knowledge of the world. He did not allow people to impose upon him, and rapidly detected the rascal tricks of jail-bird converts who called in order to announce that they had found salvation, but who really wanted to find the silver spoons or anything else they could nip off with.

Missionary zeal was certainly the strongest note of his character—the desire to carry the sacred torch to all regions of darkness. As a young man, he had spent some years at a mission in Africa—the real thing, honest man-eating blacks all round one, whole-hearted enjoyment. He loved it. In his sermons he often drew on the experiences of that happy period—telling the usual sort of missionary anecdotes with immense gusto, not fearing to shock the susceptibilities of the over-refined, calling a spade a spade. Probably it was while among the plumed cannibals that he had acquired a habit of saying exactly what he meant in the most forcible manner, and entirely neglecting grace of diction.

Mrs. Walsden, a sandy, washed-out little woman, was just the devoted wife that such a man requires. Her faith was as great as his, and her energy scarcely less remarkable. She worked for and with him, labouring at guilds, mothers' meetings, sick funds, what not; acting as housekeeper, secretary, and district messenger; she would fast in Lent as an example to others, play the church organ, go on her knees to pray for the good of the dead or to scrub some filthy bedroom floor for the convenience of the living. In the same breath she offered a wretched parishioner soup tickets, coals, and divine consolation. The one grief of her life had been loss of offspring, and its constant regret was that Mr. Walsden had not married her in time to take her with him to Africa.

The children—two weaklings—had died in a Lancashire town; poisoned, as the parents thought, by the foul smoke and miasmic air to which the higher call of duty condemned them. They would have lived in the salubrious climate of Africa.

Their miniatures hung upon the drawing-room wall—sham miniatures, some dreadful coarse process of glorifying photographs by the gift of crude colours; and there were larger, untinted portraits of the poor mites hanging in the vicar's study. When showing them to visitors he would blow his nose violently, brush his bandana handkerchief across his eyes, and say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. We both loved them. Perhaps the Lord will give again. My wife has ten years of the child-bearing period still before her. If a child of our old age were vouchsafed to us, it would be very precious."

"An' I'm sure I 'ope so," said Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Jones or whoever it happened to be. "I've bin through it myself. P'raps you recollect the fun'ral of our little Jane."

But there was no time to listen to the guest's expressions of sympathy. Sad thoughts, like everything else at the vicarage, had to be got through as promptly as possible. The rule of the house, which all habitual visitors well understood, had been borrowed from America: State your business; do your business; and go about your business.

"Let me see, Mrs. Jones, I signed your book, didn't I? Then good-bye. Shut the door after you—but don't bang it."

"Thank you, sir."

"Who is next? Who is out there? Come in."

Truly it was an endless bustle. Men, women, and children stood waiting in the hall; a servant was always wanted at the front door to let the right people in and out; the curates ascended and descended the stairs; Mrs. Walsden dived down into the kitchen to help the overwrought cook in preparing doles of broken victuals; and Mr. Walsden was here and there and everywhere, in his study one moment, and the next moment at the far end of the long passage that led to the church rooms, but always announcing his situation by a running fire of talk.

"Emily, can Mr. Emart have the use of the drawing-room for those girls? No, the confirmation class. . . . Hopkins says there is a bad escape of gas in the club cellar. Yes, of course. Send for Mr. Kay. . . . Emily, it is the singing class. Some one says the piano's locked. No, it is not locked. Use your strength, Smart, my dear fellow, force it open. The wood has swelled—that is all. . . . Now, my dear child, what do you want? . . . But why do you come here? Go back to the dispensary. See Miss Lacy. The vicar's compliments to Miss Lacy, and will she be kind enough to attend to you at once. . . . Where is my hat? . . . Can any one tell me what time we have our food to-night? Mrs. Walsden must know. Cook, what time did your mistress order supper? Oh, dear, that is the church bell. Silence, please. Do listen. Has the bell begun?"

And then perhaps practised ears straining themselves caught, as if miraculously, the monotonous clank of the bell making a kind of dull beat or rhythm amidst the hubbub.

Into all this Edward Churchill was plunged one winter's evening.

"Sir," said the maidservant, "the new curate's in th' 'all."

Mr. Walsden rushed out of his study, calling upstairs as he came.

"Oh, Mr. Churchill," and he shook hands warmly.

"Emily, Emily. It is Mr. Churchill. Oh, dear, there is that bell. Look here, I am doing a service. Yes, the bell is ringing for me. Would you care to come too? Then this way. . . . Kate—where is Kate? Somehow get Mr. Churchill's luggage taken up to his room—but do not do it yourself, Kate, or you will only hurt yourself again."

Edward noticed the beads of perspiration on Mr. Walsden's forehead, the queer smell in the long passage through which they were hurrying, the greasiness of a large map against the distempered wall; then they went through a large and a small room that obviously were used for parish work, up some steps, and into the vestry; and a minute later he was on his knees in the church, with closed eyes, praying for strength and courage.

Indeed he felt that all his courage was necessary to open his eyes and look about him without distress.

The church was almost unbelievably ugly. Built of yellowish brick, it had courses of glazed tiles running horizontally round its bare walls; columns of iron encased in plaster were another attempt at decoration, rather than any adequate or real support for the galleries under which they stood in rows; the pavement right up to the altar steps consisted of the sort of coloured and formal tessellation that is found in hotels and swimming baths; the pews, pulpit, and lecturn were made of highly varnished and clumsily moulded deal; the eastern wall had stencilled texts on whitewashed scrolls, and the table of the commandments in gold, with two or three gaudy banners. Fortunately night had robbed the stained glass windows of their terror. In the gaslight one could only just see that they were bad, but one could not guess how bad.

The service began, and the congregation—perhaps thirty women and half a dozen men, all respectably dressed—seemed devout. The cries of costermongers outside made an unceasing chorus; even while the organ played, one could hear trains passing on the nearest bridge; when the four surpliced choristers began to sing, two of them were out of tune.

Half an hour ago, as he drove in his four-wheeled cab, Edward Churchill had felt the violence of the contrast between such scenes and the spacious, tranquil grandeur of Oxford; and now in God's house he thought of St. Dunstan's Cathedral. Only by assiduous mental effort could one remember that the same deity was worshipped in these astoundingly different places. As the service proceeded he thought of the church that he had regularly attended while at the University—the fervour of its chanted prayers, the richness and completeness of the ritual. He had liked his college chapel, but his real religious duties had been performed at St. Mary's, in the town.

His discomfort increased. Every minute he became more conscious of surprise and disappointment. In truth he was feeling now what he was to feel for a long time—that aching sense of loss when of a sudden all that is beautiful has gone out of the life of one who loves and craves for beauty. He had prepared himself for the effect of contrast, but it was a contrast of an entirely different kind. He had thought, "The uglier I find the aspect of material existence in this sordid neighbourhood, the more lovely will be, by comparison, all that pertains to its spiritual life. To turn from one to the other will be to enjoy light after darkness." But now it seemed to him that this church and the surrounding streets were all one; matter, not spirit, governed them; if those shouting costers came and cried their wares in here it would scarcely seem a sacrilege.

Mr. Walsden entered the pulpit, began to preach, and Edward Churchill thought almost indignantly, "Why has he deceived me? He gave me to understand that he was a Catholic. He said he hated the term Anglican. But he and his people are not Catholics at all. They are Protestants. The service is not even what used to be called High Church; it is Low. We shall not think alike on a single point. I shall have to tell him this plainly. Meanwhile, I blame myself for having acted so hastily. It was stupid to accept the first chance that offered. At any rate, I ought to have come here and seen for myself, instead of taking so much for granted."

And then, not listening to the sermon, he thought of how he would explain matters, both as to his inclinations in regard to ceremonial and his habit of mind when interpret-ing articles of faith. He thought: "I and all those with whom I have associated and wish to associate are not in the least slaves to terms, and we only insist on them because of the plain meaning they convey. That is why we must use that word Catholic and hold firm to its significance. We belong to the Catholic Church in England, which is exactly the same church as in the Martyr's day at St. Dunstan's—it has been an unbroken succession down the long splendid line of archbishops. It is the same as Roman Catholicism—except that we threw off allegiance to the Pope at a certain period of our history; and the allegiance, in fact, had been slight, because before the unhappy quarrel and split, the Popes had always recognised our right to considerable liberty as the great Western pioneers or colonists. Nowadays, then, we are one with the Roman Catholic in everything, except that we do not recognise the Pope, nor the modern inventions or developments of the Papacy—such as Mariolatry, the Immaculate Conception, and so on. But these are trifles compared with the great principles of faith which remain unchanged, and which are identical with them and with us. First and foremost, the Mass—the Sacrifice of the Eucharist; and I must tell Mr. Walsden that if he does not want me to teach this straight sequence of penitence, confession, remission of sins, and the eucharistic sacrament—well, I can't teach anything at all, and he had better let me go before I unpack my things."

Then he folded his hands and listened. The preacher was finishing an anecdote, which he had introduced as an illustration, about some bad and preposterous act committed by a naked black man. "I didn't blame him"—and Edward noticed the tone of Walsden's shrewd kind voice, and his simple enthusiastic manner. "No, I didn't blame him. No, poor fellow, he sinned in ignorance—as you and I, my friends, make our mistakes, and think we are all right—cock-sure, sometimes, that we are right, just when we are most wrong."

After the service was over and the congregation had all gone out, Churchill went back to the vestry. Mr. Walsden was hurriedly unrobing himself, and perspiration in thicker beads showed on his bald forehead. He introduced Churchill to the curate who had been assisting.

"Smart, here is Mr. Churchill. Smart will show you round to-morrow. Smart knows the ropes—none better. Now where is Mr. Hopkins? Hopkins, I must explain, is a church warden and an extremely good fellow—and he is bringing me the printer's proofs of some balance sheets. But why isn't he here? Oh, I do wish people would be punctual. Smart, do go and look for him."

Then, alone with Churchill, he spoke jovially. "Well, what do you think of us?"

Churchill hinted at his wonder.

"Ah, I see." Walsden pulled a chair forward, and sat down by the table. "Oh, dear, where are the pens and blotting paper? Shut the door, please. Look here. Are you very advanced? Tell me your position precisely."

But Churchill found now that he could not state the reasons of his disappointment with the firmness and uncompromising method that had seemed, such a little while ago, to be necessary. Something in Walsden's aspect, as well as in a memory of his sermon, made it impossible to say anything that could conceivably wound. However, speaking very gently, he nevertheless succeeded in expressing his most fixed opinions with clearness.

"That's all right," said Walsden. "I quite agree—in essentials. Shake hands;" and he stretched his hand across the table. "You and I will get on together. You're frank and open. You don't beat about the bush. It would have been a blow to me if you didn't like us, because we were so glad to get you."

Then he went on to say that to him personally outward form was of very little consequence. He conducted matters exactly as his predecessor had done, because the heads of the congregation had petitioned him not to make any changes. "I agreed at once. As I say, I don't attach much importance to it. But Mrs. Walsden would like it the other style—*your* style. She points out, truly enough, that *one ought to go with the tide*. In many respects it would be advantageous. But you and I will talk of this at length."

Just then there came a tapping at the door.

"Ah, that is Hopkins—at *last*;" and Mr. Walsden continued very rapidly and cheerily. "Take my word for it, you'll settle down with us all right. Give us a trial anyway.

. . . . Come in, Mr. Hopkins. . . . This is Mr. Churchill, who, as you are aware, is good enough to come to us for his diaconate, and, as we hope, for much longer; and being a gentleman of independent means, he declines to take any payment." Saying this Walsden rubbed his hands together and smiled contentedly. "A very welcome, kind, useful present, that means to the parish. By the way, Hopkins, let this go no further. We don't want the tale running round that a rich person has arrived. Churchill, my dear fellow, we have such greedy sharks, and wolves in lamb's clothing. Oh, dear, there's so much to tell you, so many warnings to give you, but all that must be postponed for the moment."

At the vicarage, supper was ready and waiting for everybody, but nobody came to the dining-room. There were still people in the hall, the front door opened and shut every minute, Mrs. Walsden and the cook bustled up and down the kitchen stairs with parcels of provisions.

Finally, however, the assembly at the supper table was complete—Mrs. Walsden standing up to carve a joint of cold boiled beef, Mr. Walsden sitting by her side, and begging people to take of a new jar of pickles, Mr. Smart eating heartily, and Mr. Gardiner, the other curate, eating very sparingly. Mr. Gardiner had appeared last of all, and the sight of him in his cassock, making the sign of the cross as he murmured a grace before he sat down, was cheering and comforting. He was small, dark, and very thin, with an ascetic face. Smart, on the contrary, was large and rather smug; evidently not quite a gentleman, although no doubt a very good Christian. Instinctively Churchill liked the small man in the cassock much better than the big man in the frock coat.

"Will you not patronise these pickles?" said Walsden hospitably. "The wife, bless her heart, makes a pilgrimage to Barking for them. We get them from a dear girl—yes, a sweet, good girl—who lets us have them at wholesale price. It is all above board—no hankey-pankey. They allow her the privilege at the factory. Smart, help yourself. Smart is a tremendous fellow for our Barking pickles."

And then, to Churchill's profound astonishment, he adverted to the conversation in the vestry.

"Emily, our friend and I have already had a brief chat on the most serious topics. Far too brief—unfortunately we were interrupted. But strictly in the same connection, there was something that I particularly wanted to tell you, Churchill. It has slipped my memory. What was it? Candles? Vestments? Those banners? Oh, dear!" And he tapped his forehead and closed his eyes, searching for the lost thread.

Churchill sat looking at his plate. It seemed incredible that such sacred matters should thus be publicly and casually dealt with.

"Ah! I have it. With regard to ritual generally—I was telling you we all see we are not up to date, and it is a great handicap. We put ourselves completely out of the fashion. Yes, I ought to warn you, perhaps, that here, where the fight is stiffest, scarcely any help comes from outside."

And he went on to say how smart society folk arrived in batches to do "East-Ending," but never entered this parish. Father Halliday at Poplar, Mr. Iredale at Canning Town, Mr. Reeves of Bow were in close touch with the swells, could command their presence at club openings and prize-givings, and did not hesitate, when pressed for funds, to ask for a Fancy Dress Ball at the Albert Hall, or a matinée at a West End theatre. Mr. Lock, of Burmah Bridge, famous for his sensational advertising, was regularly patronised by a princess of the blood, who thought nothing of driving along the East India Dock Road in a royal carriage. But all these clergyman practised the choicest and most picturesque rites; they were strictly fashionable, and therefore interesting and sympathetic to people whose entire life was ruled by fashion. "They and their grand friends not only leave us out in the cold, they look down on us." As he said this Walsden flushed, and his voice for a moment showed emotion. "Yes, I cannot but admit, the clergy all round have not shown, either to Mrs. Walsden or myself, a very generous spirit. They ignore us—they cut us as much as they can."

Mrs. Walsden had silently put her hand upon his coat sleeve, and he lifted the hand to his lips and kissed it.

"All right, sweetheart. You are always right. We can get on without the fine birds or the fine feathers."

"And you forget the Verschoyles," said Mrs. Walsden. "Always remember the Verschoyles."

"Ah, yes, indeed," said Walsden gaily. "*They* are made of different stuff." And he told Churchill about this kind rector of St. Ursula's and his sweet wife, and the charming qualities possessed by both of them. Verschoyle often invited Walsden to preach in the handsome church of St. Ursula, and he himself would always come cheerfully to preach at St. Bede's. Morever, once when Mrs. Walsden was ill, Mrs. Verschoyle acted as sick nurse, and took the patient home with her to spend a fortnight in the beautiful rectory, resting and picking up strength.

But now the maid came into the room and checked Mr. Walsden's busy tongue. A person who was too dirty to be admitted desired an interview. Would the vicar go and speak to the person at the door?

"Yes, Kate, certainly I will;" and Walsden jumped up from his chair.

"Do you want your supper kept for you?" asked Mrs. Walsden.

"No. I have had quite sufficient."

Edward Churchill watched the vicar as he bustled away. Then he glanced at the vicar's plate with the cold meat and pickles still on it, at the nearly full glass of ginger beer, at the hunk of bread out of which only a corner had been nibbled. The vicar had been talking so much that he had lost his opportunity for eating. And it came to Churchill as a sudden thought— a thought like those which years ago often seemed to come from nowhere—that one must not criticise this perspiring old man. So there and then he determined never to question him; to be docile towards him, to submit to his judgment whenever possible; to act to him as youth should act to age, as a subordinate to a superior officer.

The turmoil went on—no rest, no peace. He had done some unpacking and had been out in the streets. It was nearly eleven o'clock now, and he strolled out again. In the little fair created by the costers' barrows the evening only seemed beginning; and the naphtha flares made one's eyes ache, the men's voices grated harshly, the girls' faces saddened one. He came back to the vicarage; but there was no rest yet. Two young women stood on the threshold, and Walsden was talking loudly as he hustled a loafing man out of the study and through the hall.

"Christ never said anything of the sort, nor I either. And it is a bit of great impertinence your saying so. Now be off. And don't venture to show yourself here again until your heart is softened." Then he turned from the door. "Oh, dear, that is very discouraging. I quite thought that his heart was permanently softened." Then he turned once more. "But I'm forgetting. Now, Nancy Burton, what is it? You know, it is getting late."

At last such indications as a bolted front door, lowered gas jets, and candlesticks on the hall table, announced that the vicarage day was nearly if not quite over. Edward had decided to go to bed, when Walsden called up the stairs after him.

"Look here. If you're not tired, do come into my room, and have a pipe and a chat. Will you?"

"With the greatest pleasure."

Mr. Smart was in the study, but soon, yawning woefully, he apologised for his sleepiness and left the vicar and Churchill alone together.

"This is a treat," said Walsden, with a contented sigh. "An hour stolen from oblivion. Sleep's good, but this is better, eh? We keep such hours for Sunday nights as a rule —but one must make exceptions."

His manner, even his aspect had changed; the hurry and fussiness disappeared; he spoke quietly and pleasantly. Churchill noticed the change, and believed that he understood it. This was what the man would be normally and always, were he not almost working himself to death.

"Light up," said Walsden, "and make yourself comfortable. You must have the arm-chair."

"Oh, no."

"To oblige me—to-night, at any rate."

But Churchill insisted that the host should occupy his own proper chair, and presently he was leaning back in it smoking complacently. Nevertheless he observed Churchill with great attention, for the first time able to study the newcomer at his ease.

"You have a fine athletic frame—although so spare. How tall are you?"

"Exactly six feet."

"In your stockings?"

"Yes."

"And how old? You told me, but it has slipped my memory."

"I am not quite twenty-five."

"Dear me. You look much older. Yes, I should have guessed you at thirty-two, or thirty-three. How is that? Have you passed through much trouble?"

"No. I have had an unusually happy life."

"Then it must be because of your self-possession. You have great self-possession."

"Have I?" And Churchill, standing by the chimney-piece and filling his pipe, smiled down at Walsden in the arm-chair.

"I don't mean *side,*" and Walsden laughed up at him. "No, I see very well you aren't that sort of Oxonian. But you have *presence*. A very good thing too."

Then they smoked and talked for a long time, and it seemed that in every minute they liked each other better.

Walsden, speaking of the propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts and of happy days under a tropical sun, expressed wonder that Edward had been able to remain in England. "Yes, I rather wonder that, with your means, you did not treat yourself to a few years of that. It is very delightful—the freedom—the reality of it—and so healthy. For a rich young man, full of vigour—most attractive. Although I need not say how glad I am you chose us instead. When I heard you were coming, I said, 'This is a godsend in the truest sense of the word;' and I sank on my knees and offered up a few words of thanksgiving. My wife will tell you."

Edward replied that he had often thought of missionary enterprise and had been greatly drawn towards it, more particularly in regard to a Javanese mission that was the work of Oxford men. But then he abandoned this idea, together with many others, because he had slowly arrived at a settled conviction of the soundness of the theory of doing the thing nearest to your hand. "And the Commercial Road is so much nearer than Java."

"Well, that's a good answer too—a very good answer;" and Walsden smiled and nodded his head.

And another reason, as Edward explained, was his mother. She was alone; he did not like to leave her—and he told Walsden briefly how he hoped soon to make a home for her, and have her with him. "She and I are very dependent on each other; and outside her affections, religion is all in all to her."

But there was still another reason, a strong selfish reason; and Edward Churchill, while unfolding this, would have perhaps seemed priggish but for an obvious absence of conceit, and if he had not spoken as though he now felt a complete confidence in Walsden's wisdom and an absolute assurance of his comprehending sympathy. For a moment or two Walsden perhaps felt that Mr. Churchill was about to ride the high horse, get on stilts, or even indulge in Oxford swagger; but then he listened with growing approval of the young man himself. He liked the steady outlook of eye, the virile yet tender expression that played about the lips, the repose of the whole mask that was so strong in the width of brow, and so unsensual in its clear-cut nose and narrowed chin. There was certainly great charm of manner, and surely there must be gifts that would prove useful as well as ornamental. Yes, behind it all there must lie a radiance of soul; a pure, sweet, but forcible mind, from which thoughts sprang in a lofty sweep, lit up with the soul-radiance—thoughts not in themselves valuable perhaps, but beautiful as water thrown from a fountain into sunlight. And as Churchill went on expounding his views, Walsden thought, "This is a rare bird in the East End —an intellectual aristocrat, and not merely a person of fashion, like one of Father Bryan's crowd;" and with the thought came the beginning of a quite unreasoned love. Instinct told him that henceforth he would love his deacon as much as he could love any individual without detriment to love of the entire race; that, whether he wished to do so or not, he would bring him as far forward from the ruck of humanity as was proper or permissible.

With regard to his other reason against exile in rough wild lands, Edward said that a fullness and completeness of the inner life meant so much to him that he dared not relinquish or even jeopardise it. "To that extent I am selfishly and schemingly a man of thought. To me, the supreme beauty of the Christian faith is that it satisfies the reason. If brooded on it floods the widest minds. Its philosophy is as perfect as the faith; and its adaptability is so wonderful. It is so simple and yet so all-embracing that, despite of two thousand years of progress, in all the intricateness and complexities of modern life, there is nothing that it will not answer. No predicament can befall the wisest man but Christ will put him straight. And this makes the intercourse among thinking Christians so pleasant. They can help one another. When assailed by doubts, they can derive support from their allies. And surely that must be the greatest glory of the priest—or, say his most subtle joy—when some noble mind comes to him for aid; when the priest fights and beats down the doubts; when he chases them like devils through the stately halls of the man's mind—fights them in the throne-room, the ante-rooms, and outer chambers, driving them headlong at last from the thought-palace, and leaving its splendid peace unbroken.

"Well then, you can't have this among the savages. We of the civilised world are too high above them; our thoughts are unthinkable by them. They are—as science tells us—where our remote ancestors were in the scale of human intelligence. There can be no communion of minds. You give them the bare facts and call upon their faith. With them it must be all faith—because they have no reasoning faculties to satisfy. If they are attacked by doubt, it must be the sort of devil that can be knocked on the head with a bludgeon. Something you said in your sermon sums it up. You told us that black preachers do the quickest work—that converted heathens are the best missionaries to the heathen, because they are in closer sympathy or harmony of ideas. Then nearly all the higher powers of an educated man would seem wasted. To go as a young man might mean the renunciation of one's dreams or hopes of ever doing the higher class work of our Master. After all, He has developed the delicate instrument of men's brains—and it cannot be wrong to hope that He will let us use the instrument—all of it—in His service.

"I am afraid this sounds vainglorious—it is not consciously so," and Edward had a deprecating smile. "It is complete selfishness perhaps. And I trust you don't think I am belittling the noble work of the life-long missionary. I can see that, even from my own point of view, it may be more Christlike—the renunciation of the joy of thinking—the grandeur of giving all. And practically it may be a more noble—a more widely useful task. Because the missionary is moulding future generations. In a sense he is rough-hewing, without set pattern, for God himself; he is preparing, for God to complete in future ages, the clumsy models that he has bravely attempted to shape. Better, I mean, when all is over—better to have been the man who made the first rough harpsichord than the man who went about the villas to set the pianos in tune. That might be the philosophical view of it."

"I can see one thing, young gentleman—you are a philosopher yourself. You look all round questions. And not a bad thing either. Oh dear;" and Walsden sighed plaintively. "This has been very refreshing; and I could sit smoking here till dawn—but then I should go about my work to-morrow half asleep; and I do assure you, you want your eyes wide open in St. Bede's."

XIII

Edward Churchill never forgot the impression made upon him by the first Saturday evening and the Men's Club. Truly there could be no need to go to Java: the savages were here, all round him.

Before visiting the club he was taken for a little tour of exploration by Mr. Smart, who said rather sententiously, "The vicar has charged me to show you round, and if agreeable to you I will do so, although I cannot profess to be a highly skilled guide. My own duties lie in a small area, and I do not willingly go out of it."

They passed from the noise and lamplight of the marketing centre into dark and comparatively empty streets; and Mr. Smart spoke again with the same sententious tone.

"To-night, of course, is the great East End festival, and one should be prepared to be somewhat shocked if one is not used to it, but our particular week-end has obtained more notoriety than it deserved because of the murders;" and he said a few words about the series of abominable crimes concerning which the world still talked.

"But did the murders happen here?" asked Churchill.

"Two of them—and both on Saturday night. That, of course, seemed so very daring—it being a time when there are more people passing to and fro. Excuse me a moment."

They had stopped outside a greengrocer's shop, and Mr. Smart spoke to the shopman.

"You'll be at the club later?"

"No, not to-night, sir. The missis has got comp'ny."

The level of the shop was about two feet below the pavement, and it was merely a room from which the glass window had been removed, and on the walls of which a few deal shelves had been fixed. The stock consisted of onions hanging in strings and some large piles of potatoes and small piles of turnips and carrots. Nothing in the nature of green vegetables was visible. The door behind the shop was open, and one could see in the gaslight an end of a bed with four people sitting on it, a woman rocking a cradle, five or six other people standing and drinking—a compact and quite contented evening party gathered together within a space of perhaps nine feet square.

"Dance is one of the vicar's pillars—pillar of the Church, I mean," said Mr. Smart, as they walked on. "Quite a good type. . . . Now this will interest you;" and he dropped his voice, as if anxious not to be overheard by any passer-by. "This is the scene of our last murder."

They had come to a corner where a fairly wide street opened suddenly on their right between a high blank wall and the back of a factory. The glimmering light from a lamp-post near the corner showed one but a few yards of this avenue, and then all became opaque darkness.

"Cul-de-sac," whispered Mr. Smart, and he advanced a little way towards the darkness, moving cautiously, as one who half expects something to spring out at him. "There. We won't go any farther. I can hear voices," and he put his hand on Churchill's arm. "There is a gate at the bottom, which the workpeople use in the daytime. Now, of course, everything is shut up, so no one has any business down here." Then in a still lower whisper he said, "There's a man with two women. They will make a fuss if they think we are prying on them. Come."

Churchill's eyes, growing accustomed to the gloom, could just distinguish three motionless figures at a little distance by the wall.

"Come along," said Mr. Smart. "We have the light behind us, you know, so they can see us quite plainly;" and, turning, he drew Churchill away.

"What sort of women are they?"

"Oh, the most unfortunate class—regularly leading a life of shame. There are thousands and thousands of them; and your great surprise, when you get to recognise them, will be their sordid and miserable appearance. One wonders, don't you know, that any man could fall so low as to be lured by them. But there it is;" and, moving off from the ill-famed spot, Mr. Smart resumed a conversational tone and seemed more at ease. "I am glad you saw that—because it was really a peep behind the scenes. You can imagine all the rest. The victim and her chance companion went down as far as the gate—and then, just out of sight but quite within sound, the deed was done. As a fact, there was no sound made."

"But those women we saw—were they safe?"

"Oh, yes. *Two* of them, don't you see? Besides, the man those two were with was probably quite a respectable fellow. You know what I mean;" and Mr. Smart chuckled smugly, as if he had made a joke. "I mean, a million to one that he wasn't a murderer. . . . Now, see. This also is typical. Good-evening, officers."

"Good-evening, sir."

A couple of policemen had passed side by side, and Mr. Smart remarked upon the fact that only at this end of the town do the police go on duty in pairs. He assured Churchill that there was a very necessary caution in this habit, since single policemen had on occasions been most mercilessly knocked about—indeed, even two at a time had been maltreated.

"You know, theoretically," he went on, "the cloth is always respected. Mr. Walsden declares one need never fear personal violence. It is a saying that the doctor and the parson may go anywhere—with few exceptions. Personally, I confess I think our friend Walsden pushes the theory too far. For instance, to-night he asked me to take you through the worst places, as if it was the most natural thing in the world—and it would have been just the same if he had been asking me to go alone. Although," and Mr. Smart laughed, "I might not have accepted the invitation so readily. For though I have never yet been threatened, I have several times been grossly insulted."

"I would always go with you—if you would be good enough to let me—to answer any call."

Smart said he would be delighted to avail himself of this offer, and he should certainly remember it; but he added that, for the most part, he preferred to remain in the immediate vicinity of the church and the church rooms, attending to parochial organisation. The other curate, Gardiner, was fonder of going afield.

It was curious, but instinctively, invincibly, Churchill liked Mr. Smart less and less. He seemed deficient in sympathy, narrow of outlook, unimaginative. And there was something very jarring about his talk of danger. Churchill thought of the police: merely paid servants of the public, who have to go anywhere—one by one, or two by two—at the call of duty. And if a policeman may face all risks, surely a servant, a soldier of Christ may do so.

From the side streets they came in a moment to the main thoroughfare, and were amidst streams of people, the trams and omnibuses rattling by, gaslight flaring, and a cold wind blowing. Outside a small music-hall, drawn by the blaze of electric light and the gaudy pictorial advertisements, the crowd had assembled so thickly that it was difficult to get through; then, when the pressure lessened, one had to make a detour in order not to interfere with ragged, dirty children dancing in front of a piano organ; and all along the broad pavement one had to steer wide of flaunting girls who were followed and often surrounded by groups of pallid boys and young men. The girls—some of them quite young—were smartly dressed, as though for a summer promenade on some seaside pier; with bolero hats set jauntily on curled fringes, cream-coloured or mauve jackets fitting close to their hips, and many-tinted skirts and scarfs flapping in the chill breeze. All their faces were painted and powdered.

"O crikey, look at the Devil-dodgers," said one of them, and she laughed hoarsely, calling after Smart to give her a kiss next Good Friday.

Another of them nudged Churchill's elbow and said, "Cheer up, ole pal. Don't look so glum. What price 'oly water?"

"Who are these young women?" he asked Smart.

"Well, how shall I express it? They are, so to speak, amateurs—but I fear, from a moral point of view, as completely lost as the—er—professionals."

After less than a hundred yards of the main thoroughfare they turned back into a slanting street that seemed to be another market-place, and busier, more prosperous, more cheerful than the one they had left behind them at the church. Just at the bottom of this street a man had stationed himself on an island of pavement where the trams and buses stopped, and he was loudly preaching to the empty air. Tram passengers stood close to him, hawkers with baskets brushed against him, some little children played all round and almost through his legs; but not a living soul listened, or even took the faintest notice of him, as he ranted about heaven and hell. He was a finely built man, in his physical prime, black-coated, of the superior mechanic class, with a handsome, strong face, and staring eyes that had no flash in them, but just vitreous fixity of stare.

Mr. Smart said what Edward Churchill was thinking. "There's an obvious madman. You can see it in his eyes."

They walked up the street, all among the stalls, and Churchill noticed a brightness and gaiety that came as a great relief. The shops seemed much better than any he had yet seen, the people better clothed, healthier, and more like men and women anywhere else. Respectable mothers of families put their purchases in perambulators and smiled at wide-awake babies, girls and young men walked together as if they were engaged couples, and a soldier in uniform carried a jolly little chap astride on his neck to see the fun.

"We have got beyond the boundary of St. Bede's," said Mr. Smart. "This is not in our parish. But as soon as we cross the water we shall be back again."

Almost immediately they turned out of the street, left the cheerfulness of this more fortunate parish, and, passing through an alley, came to a footbridge over a canal. In this open space one could look about one, and Churchill saw with surprise that the moon had risen and was shining palely and sadly in the midst of a wild, cloud-swept sky. There was moonlight on the water, the mud banks, and the slate roofs of lean-to sheds.

They crossed the footbridge, went under a railway arch, and entered a street that ran parallel with the canal.

"Now we are back in St. Bede's," said Mr. Smart whisperingly; "in the very worst part. Criminals, really bad class here. Gangs only waiting to set on any stranger—rob him, kill him, chuck his dead body in the canal;" and he linked his arm through Churchill's, and led him slowly. "It is never advisable to appear to hurry. They don't like that—and then they get suspicious."

It was terrible: oppressing the imagination, making one not timorous but appalled. The streets were straight, set very close together, and over the low roofs the interminable brick viaduct threw its shadow by day and made the nights darker. There seemed to be scarcely any street lamps; the houses, with windows all tight-shut and black as the walls, gave only a gleam here and there from an open doorway; so that, but for the moonlight, it would have been like a cold, evil-smelling cavern—like some labyrinth underground, like a deep-buried inferno where one dreaded but could not guard against chance contact with the dwellers in darkness.

Yet one almost wished that the moon would not shine; for all that its rays showed was so ugly, so vile, so fantastically sinister. One saw, as if sketched in grey and silver on black paper, small courts that issued out of the street at intervals—narrow irregularly shaped openings with shanties rather than houses on either side, seeming like the assemblage of roofed shelters where poultry would be kept and not human beings; and one knew that just beyond the bottom of such courts, divided from them by some crazy rails, if divided at all, there was the deep fosse of the canal with its black slimy flood ready to hide every secret. The air, although impregnated with unpleasant odours, seemed every moment to grow colder and thinner, as if the breath of famine had long since exhausted its warmth and sustaining virtues. And an extraordinary lifeless silence reigned over everything.

There were very few people about; but, as Churchill and his guide walked slowly on, people seemed to come flitting like phantoms, all silent of footfall, voiceless, taking strange shapes as they merged from shadow, moving through a patch of moonlight and melting in further shadow. Then one began to notice men standing in doorways; men quite unexpectedly crossed the road just in front of one, or passed out of one house into another, as if the whole district was the common dwelling of one vast wicked family.

"We must not go back the way we came," whispered Mr. Smart. "They are very easily upset. If they fancied they were being watched or exhibited, it would get on their nerves. . . . Hush!"

A large man and a very small woman had come out of a beer-shop at a corner and were now walking by their sides. The man was like Bill Sikes and nobody else to be met with in fact or fiction. The woman was middle-aged, dressed in a black gown and bonnet, and she looked like an old-fashioned pew-opener who had been left out in the rain for weeks and got so sodden and dilapidated that birds or boys might mistake her for a scarecrow. Churchill guessed, but tried not to believe, that she was one of the unhappy persons described by Smart—the professional siren of the slums.

The man spoke, but although close to him one could not hear his words.

"How was I to leave," expostulated the woman, "without saying good-night to 'im?"

The man spoke again, and again inaudibly.

"I merely addressed the word good-night to him. That is all I said to him."

The man spoke once more, growling; and the woman seemed to trot forward as a dog does when sworn at by its master; and then both of them vanished. Where? Utterly impossible to say. Round an unseen corner, through a dark entry, behind the red curtain of another tavern. They seemed to be walking close by, a little way ahead, and at one's side again, and in a moment they were gone, and Churchill and Smart walked on alone.

So they went through street after street, now near the viaduct arches, now losing sight of this landmark, and Smart remarked in a whisper that sounded huskily tremulous, "The—the bother is that it's so easy to lose one's way. Let us turn down here. No. I am wrong. That's a cul-de-sac. We must keep on."

Then presently he paused, irresolute. "I—I think we must retrace our steps—though I don't like doing it. W-what do you think?"

Churchill was not given time to answer. For at that moment there came from somewhere quite near, a piercingly shrill cry. It was the scream of a woman, and scream followed scream.

Truly it made one's blood run cold; it seemed to be the concentrated expression of all one's accumulated horror; the thing that one had been fearing and anticipating and vainly hoping that one might somehow escape being forced to hear.

"It is this way. Yes, it is here." Churchill had rushed frantically and Smart had clung to him, impeding him. Now

Churchill shook him off at the entrance of a court. In the moonlight they could both see two women fighting desperately, while four or five men stood calmly watching.

"You—you'd much better not try to interfere," stammered Smart. "I wish you wouldn't. Then I—I'll run for the police."

Only by their garments could one have known that they were really women. The shrieks had quieted down to snarlings, squealings, gasps, and they clutched and tore at each other now, with the wild fury of animals. The men, hands in pockets, watched without excitement; neither applauding nor criticising; merely shifting their position in order to make room when the combatants swung or rolled towards them.

"You brutes, help me." Churchill, dragging at one of the women, felt the disgust, the anger, and the impotence that are usually experienced by anybody who, without a strong stick, and unaided, attempts to stop a dog fight. "Help me, you blackguards."

"No business of yours," said a man apathetically and not in the least wrathfully. "It's our business."

"Then do your business. Quick. Catch hold of her."

The man, with leisurely movements, stepped forward, put his arms round the waist of the woman who still remained free and who was taking every advantage of her freedom; and now he quietly drew her away.

"There, stow it." And another man began to curse both women heartily. "Jer see—get indoors."

Churchill looked round, and the women were there no more. Like dogs they had crept to kennel at the master's voice. He looked round again, and all the men except one were gone too.

To this last remaining man he talked for a little while, at first passionately, then quietly and pleadingly; but he elicited the very slighest response. He could not see the man's face, but he knew quite well that it was dull, expressionless, without thought and with very little life.

"I pray you not to let them do it again. I will come back and see you all by daylight. I want to know you. I mean nothing but kindness to you. I had no right to speak roughly to you. For that I ask your pardon. . . . Will you shake hands—to show you don't mind?"

The man spat upon the ground, and shook hands as requested. His hand was limp and nerveless.

"Good-night."

"Goo'-night, sir."

Churchill slowly made his way out through the dark, silent streets, and a throbbing pity filled his breast. He thought, "How could these poor souls be otherwise than coarse and dirty and fierce, living under such conditions? If they were pure and clean, they would go mad from despair. And probably it is not true that they are nearly as bad as Smart says, and all his notions about their watching one and being ready to rob or kill any stranger are just cowardly nonsense."

Certainly no one displayed the least disposition to molest him, or even to look at him, as he retraced his steps; and two or three people of whom he inquired the way answered civilly and sensibly.

At the canal bridge he met Smart hurrying towards him with two stalwart policemen. The policemen laughed when they heard they were not wanted, and said it was exactly what they had told "his reverence."

Going past the cheerful shops again, Churchill remained silent, but Smart talked volubly.

"I can't tell you how glad I am it ended all right. What should I have said to the vicar? I'm sure you acted very pluckily—but, you know, you really did a very reckless thing. I don't wish to exaggerate, but you might have been torn to pieces."

Churchill was struggling hard to repress his contempt, telling himself that he must not judge others. Yet he could not help thinking, "If this man is a coward he should not pretend to be a priest of the Church militant. Sooner or later he will disgrace himself. Indeed, his faith must be weak, or his heart would be stouter. But I will not judge; I will not think evil."

At the place where the trams stopped, that same black-coated man was still preaching. Nobody listened, nobody cared, nobody seemed to be aware of his existence. His voice sounded harsh and weary; his eyes were fixed in a glassy stare, as if he saw nothing and heard nothing of the movements and noises all round him, as if he thought of nothing on earth either near or far, but was solely concerned with the heaven and hell about which he went on ranting.

XIV

THE Saturday club was held in the large ground-floor room of the St. Bede's Church Institute, a building that contained accommodation and served as headquarters for various other clubs, guilds, and parish working bodies. The peculiarity of this week-end club lay in the fact that it had no regular members; it was open to any one who cared to come in from the streets—that is, any unintoxicated passer-by who promised either by implication or formal vow, to behave himself "like a gentleman" when inside. Mr. Walsden used to stand sometimes outside the door, inviting all the male half of the population to avail themselves of his hospitality. Ladies were not admitted, if they could be kept out; but it had happened more than once that a dozen or twenty bold and unblushing representatives of the fair sex forcibly imposed their company and caused great unpleasantness. Also on several occasions the rowdy-dowdy boys had made a raid, smashing glass, furniture and gas brackets.

At such times Mr. Walsden sought no redress from the law, refused to prosecute, scarcely complained to any one; but just mended window panes, repaired the bagatelle board, bought new benches, and next Saturday night came up smiling again after his punishment.

"Step in, Jim. Glad to see you. A friend of yours? Very glad to see him too. . . . Good-evening, sir. . . . No; I don't know you, but I shall be pleased to make your acquaintance. If you have nothing better to do, step inside and join us. Smoke your pipe, play a game of draughts or dominos—and have some coffee, if you like, one penny per cup. No sermon, no hymns, no collection."

He loved his club, and always said that as a humanising influence he considered it invaluable. When people had once come, they nearly always came again; and after one had got to know them at the club it was often an easy task to make them go to church.

The room was fairly full when Churchill arrived, and as a newcomer to the parish he received considerable attention. Walsden and Gardiner introduced him to honoured frequenters, and others freely introduced themselves. Especially a young man with brown eyes and an insinuating manner made continuous advances, acting as self-appointed master of ceremonies, and explaining and expounding quite evident matters. This young man proved a great nuisance; first because he plainly desired to extract a gift of money, and Churchill had been solemnly exhorted to give no money to anybody, and secondly because he checked the expansive confidence of many who were ready and anxious to expand. In two minutes Churchill understood that all these people took intense pleasure in speaking about themselves and their private affairs, and that much might be learned by quietly listening to them.

They were nearly all of them undersized; very few were fairly shaped, and among the elder men the slow distorting effects of a toil that is greater than the physical strength that meets it were painfully visible. Churchill noticed one tall man, who stood with his bowler hat tilted so far back that it seemed to stand on the back of his neck, and his hands deep-plunged in his trousers pockets, while he grinned as if enormously amused.

"Dam funny thing, this," he said to Churchill, uttering the words slowly and thickly. "I can't get the hang of it. Never bin here before. The guv'nor says, why not? He says come in here. And here I am. I don't mind it—from what I see of it.

" 'Is employment," said the brown-eyed young man, "is the spirits and wine trade—carrying and lifting of the barrels. The temptation in that trade is to get on the drink, and you can see fer yerself, 'e 'as done it."

"Who do you say is drunk?" asked the tall man.

"I don't say nothing for you to worry about," said the brown-eyed young man. "But you 'ave 'ad yer drop, old mate, 'an you know it."

"I have;" and the tall man grinned good-humouredly. Then he became very angry. "But *if* I have—yes, *if* I have, what the ——— hell's it got to do with you?"

"Language, please," said Mr. Gardiner, immediately crossing to the raised voice. "Moderate language—that is our rule. . . . How are you getting on, Churchill? Here is some one who must be presented to you. Mr. Philbrick, this is Mr. Churchill."

"He is a very nice vurchius ole gentleman," said the brown-eyed man in a patronising tone.

Mr. Philbrick seemed indeed a most respectable old chap. He was clean-shaved, with a fringe of grey hair under his chin, and a big black scarf worn round his neck above a collarless flannel shirt and hanging down over his jacket. When talking he screwed up his eyes, wrinkled his whole face, and put an extraordinary amount of deep meaning into his manner, while he pointed over his shoulder with his pipe, nodded or jerked an arm significantly. At the moment he was profoundly interested in a game of draughts, and he pantomimed excessive delight when one of the players, a fat-faced, seedy-looking youth, got his man beat. This result was generally admitted by all the bystanders, although the defeated player, a middle-aged bearded man, never looked up, but continued desperately to examine the board, hoping still to find some loop-hole of escape.

"It's a friend o' mine," said Mr. Philbrick, indicating the conqueror with his pipe. "I taught him the game myself. . . . Oh, my boy, you could o' ruffed him there."

Everybody protested. "Don't intermeddle. No tellin'."

The fat-faced youth said, "*I* seen it—he might o' ruffed me too."

"He seen it all right," said Mr. Philbrick; "or I shouldn't 'a' spoken."

"But you *did* speak," said the defeated player; "an' you're a silly ——— for yer pains. Why can't yer hold yer ——— tongue?"

"Language, please," cried Gardiner. "My dear friends, do moderate your language. What is the sense of swearing at every other word?"

Mr. Philbrick drew away from the draught-players, and presently he was telling Churchill the story of his conversion to the Christian faith.

He was a widower who until two years ago had been extremely prosperous; then health and work failed together, and he fell into such dire want that he nearly died of starvation. "It was that or the work'uss," he said, nodding and winking prodigiously. The landlord came to him in his room and told him that he must clear out at the end of the week. "Well, I says, I make no fuss, I offer no blackguarding. Just so. If I can't pay—nothing else to do. So you needn't puff and blow about it.

"That was the Monday—my chest very bad too, and the snow on the ground; and I thinks, 'Off with you, Philbrick, and try and earn a bob along with the rest, road-scraping—or else it's the work'uss Saturday night.' But, sir, I couldn't stomach it. You'll believe me, it wasn't the shirks, for I do assure you I've worked very hard in my time. Any one 'll tell you the same as how old Mr. Philbrick isn't a shirker. But I was just tired and sick of it. So, thinks I"—and he lightly tapped Churchill on the chest with his pipe and stopped to chuckle merrily—"thinks I, 'I'll just dodge the work'uss and everything else along of it.' "

Then he described how he retired to bed, ate his last bit of food in bed, smoked his last screw of tobacco, and lay there quite comfortable, dozing and musing. Hunger at first was hard to support; but he did not suffer as much as he expected; after three days he became light-headed. "An' by Friday afternoon I was to the naked eye no more than a corpse."

On Friday night, however, Mr. Walsden came in a mysteriously providential manner and rescued him. "I never rightly understood how he found me, sir. But it was something to do with Christmas—which was falling due the Sunday. An' Mr. Walsden's very particular about supplying a bit of Christmas dinner to them as else wouldn't get none. I took it very kind of him, and I like these religious gentlemen. Yes, he done more for me than others. I assure you, sir, there was two men in the same house who owed me money, and never so much as climb the stairs to ask how I was. Three doors down the street I had another debitor, who owed me four pounds odd—and not a sign from him neither. But Mr. Walsden brought me back to life and set me on my legs again, and in return for his kindness I accepted of the religion—a thing I'd never done till then."

"And you feel the comfort of it, Mr. Philbrick?"

"I do, sir," said Mr. Philbrick, with a glance and an accent that was absolutely convincing in regard to his sincerity. "I ask no questions. What I bin told I believe. If it's good enough for an educated gentleman like Mr. Walsden, it's good enough for me. I take my sacrament along o' the rest, an' I enjoy it."

"You may trust him, sir," said the brown-eyed young man, again at Churchill's elbow. "I've never known a pack of lies come out of the mouth of Mr. Philbrick."

"Yes," said the old chap, "Richard knows me right enough. I'm pretty well known in these parts."

There was something very attractive in Mr. Philbrick, and Churchill determined if possible to cultivate his acquaintance.

During the course of the evening he talked with other converts, young and old, and was struck in every case by the astonishing effect upon them that had been made by hearing the story of Christ's life and death. Most of them—incredible as that might seem—had heard it, or at any rate really listened to it, for the first time from Walsden; and they talked of the divine tragedy just as though it had happened only the other day. Speaking of Judas Iscariot, they grew hot with indignation, calling him "dirty dog," and saying, "The rope's too good for 'is sort, sir."

A fish porter in a tattered football jersey told Churchill that his great pleasure was to go fishing in the River Lea on Sunday, and this sport had clashed with his religious duties. "I like to get off with my rod and tackle as early as I can and make a day of it; and when Mr. Walsden asked me to go and take the bread and wine down at the church Sunday morning he said, 'There's no reason you shouldn't come, and then have your fishing after.' 'But no,' I said, 'that would be acting *Judus.* If I take it, I shall chuck the job for the day. I shan't take it, and go a-fishing.' That's right, isn't it, sir?"

"Did I 'ear you mention Judy 'Scariut?" said some one else. "'*E* was a blighter, if you like, sir, wasn't 'e?"

"S'truth," said another, "he wanted to have it given him in the neck if ever a bloke did. Dirty dog."

Churchill could not get away from Richard, the brown-eyed young man, although disliking him as a hypocrite, and at last almost explicitly stating that no money would be extracted. Indeed the unfavourable impression made by Richard led to a rash generalisation that among these people those with light or clear-coloured eyes appeared to be trusting and trustworthy, whereas those with opaque-coloured eyes were all humbugs, if not worse. Mr. Philbrick and the fish porter had transparently clear eyes, but Richard's eyes were as impenetrable as bits of brown pebble.

"I 'ope," said Richard, "I 'ave not offended you, sir," when closing time drew near. "You were so very kind when you come in, but now you seem to turn against me. I expect it's back-biters bin poisoning your ears against me."

Churchill said no one had traduced Richard; and then, having obtained permission from Walsden to do so, he stood coffee and rock cakes to Richard and the rest of the company.

"This makes me very 'appy," said Richard, sidling up, cup in hand; and until the club meeting terminated he suffered no one to come between him and the new curate.

"I 'ope I shall never fall to be a cadger," he said; "and I scorn any one as should so accuse me. He wouldn't do it twice—not if it was to my face. I b'long to a good fam'ly—an' I often say it would make a book, would my fam'ly, if written down in a truthful spirit. But the times are hard against one, though you work till you sink by the wayside. I sim to 'ave 'ad nothing except trouble and losses;" and he raised his hand to shield his mouth while speaking confidentially. "I'm gettin' up a subscription in the fam'ly to prervide me wiv a new barrer . . . My eldest sister sent me five bob at Christmas. Very kind ov 'er, I'm sure; but all the same she can afford it. She's a cook in a lady's mansion at Sevenoaks. I seen it pers'nally—five servants employed. From me brothers I asked nothing—knowing that was what I should get. Jack drinks—but, mind you, there's never bin heavy drinkin' in our fam'ly. No, as I state, we've bin a fine lot o' men. It's the girls that 'ave mostly disgraced us.

"Me two aunts finished as a burden on the rates. Me mother is a proud woman, and felt it at the time—same as she did when Mabel went to the Orspital. Me sister Mabel was the prettiest piece o' goods at fourteen you ever set eyes on. If you looked at 'er, you 'ad to kiss 'er. Fawther used to say, 'Leave off. You growing lads must remember she's yer sister.' . . . Mr. Yates—he was a gas-fitter—fell in love with her, and kep' her faithful in Ajax Buildings, deserting his own wife and kids to do so, from her seventeenth birthday till he died.

"Then she went on the streets, an' never 'ad 'nother bit o' luck. Mind you, Mabel felt her pride too. Wouldn't never come and see 'er mother unless she could bring a present in 'er 'and. Mother never rightly knew 'ow she was faring, till, as I tell you, they fetched 'er to the Orspital, an' she see her laid in the bed dying and disfigured wiv the disease. Mother said it give 'er a turn she'd carry to her grave—and she rounded on fawther, accusing him of the vice of the women of 'is family which he had transferred into the blood of Mab.

"Mind you, mother give fawther trouble in his time, though so respectable and proud in her old age. Fawther has told me wiv 'is own lips that he couldn't have a lodger in the house but what the usual annoyance followed; and that when he chastised 'er it o'ny made 'er carry on the worse. . . ."

Then Richard turned up his brown eyes and spoke sanctimoniously.

"But, sir, it is all the will of Gawd, as Mr. Walsden teaches—an' if I can subscribe meself a new barrer by Lady-day I'll bless 'is 'oly name."

XV

For a year while Churchill remained a deacon, and for nearly half a year after he had received the priest's commission he worked as if at one of those crushingly impossible tasks that torment sick men in their dreams. He was always busy and always baffled. Each new day wiped out the last. There was scarcely time to begin things, never time to finish things.

After staying a little while at the vicarage he had secured a room for himself in a block of model dwellings beyond the southern boundary of the parish. In the parish itself not a room was available. But here at Bentley House he succeeded in obtaining decent accommodation, with quiet, peacable neighbours of the highest class—permanent porters from the London Docks, Corporation roadmen, van-drivers and factory hands—whose wives were willing to sweep and clean for him, and would have cooked for him also, had he desired it. Indeed, given leisure, he might have made himself sufficiently comfortable here; but, for want of it, the packing-cases that contained his books had not yet been opened, no additions had been made to the first sticks of furniture hastily purchased, the floor still demanded the carpet he had promised it, and the one solitary ornament was the framed photograph of his mother that hung above the iron bed. It did not matter. He could not have lolled in armchairs or read books. Every morning early he used to go up to the top landing of the house just to get a glimpse of the open sky, to see the shadowy outline of Tower Bridge across the forest of roofs, or the topmasts of ships on the invisible river; then, wondering and thanking God that the sun still shone in spite of human wickedness, he went slowly down the long flights of stone steps and out into the smoke and dirt and drab-toned misery. Late at night he returned to lie down, glad that he was too tired to think, and yet sighing when he felt that the burden of an overladen world was about to slip from his shoulders, and that for a few hours he would forget all the shame, the pain, the horror.

Three or four times a week he wrote home to St. Dunstan's, pouring out his heart freely, saying the things he could only say to that dear one; but lack of time nearly always drove his pen and made broken incoherent scrawls of what would otherwise have been long thoughtful letters.

> "Dearest and best of mothers, how I yearn to fly down to you as fast as the fastest train can bring me. But I must not yield to temptation. I must not go.
>
> "To answer your two urgent questions: Yes, I am very well in health, and Walsden does praise me—far more than I deserve. But his praise is encouraging. . . .
>
> ". . . I feel that every day and all day long I am eating of the fruit of the tree of Evil Knowledge. But it is good to know. One cannot know too much; and, although I shrink and recoil, I pray that unconsciously I am growing stronger all the while. I see that without this experience I should have never been worth anything in the higher work. And, my darling, it is not going to last for ever. Soon you and I will be together again, and I shall look back on all this as a hard lesson that was well worth taking. Our separation will only make our joy in union the greater."

She added to his trouble when now and then she spoke of her loneliness, and he went about his work tortured by a sense of divided duty. He felt that he was neglecting her, and yet knew that he would not be truly worthy of her love if he could not trust it to pardon such neglect. She offered to come to London to see him, to stay for a week or two at Bentley House, if he would engage a nice bedroom and sitting-room for her; but he was forced to refuse these offers. Dear soul, she imagined Bentley House as a modest but well-managed private hotel, such as those that economical folk patronise at crowded watering places. It would not do to let her see the reality. Besides, her presence even for a day would infallibly weaken him: he would want to go straight home with her.

This, as he understood well enough, was the paramount temptation that has to be fought by all workers in places like St. Bede's—the sudden and almost overwhelming climax of a gradually accumulated desire to turn one's back and go.

> "Forgive me, my dearest, if I say little about myself. The reason is because there is really so little to say. I go on learning, learning, trying with all my might to read the book of life and see the Master's message stand out clear in every page I turn.
>
> "As to money—well, I am spending it very carefully, and only under the advice of Walsden. As to spending much on oneself—that is out of the question. If one wished to do it, one could not. There are literally no opportunities. I subscribe to all the church funds, giving most where the need is greatest, and denying myself the pleasure of obeying personal inclination. That is a part of the lesson one has to learn, and it seems easier to learn here than anywhere in the world. One must give in order to do good and not to secure a temporary joy."

Matters so well known to economists that they have long since become trite commonplaces struck him with all the force of a personal discovery; and then in his letters he would have sudden outbursts against politicians and the whole machinery of government.

> "Why don't these so-called statesmen come and live here as I am doing? All their laws and regulations for the improvement of the common lot are an utter failure. They could not be otherwise. They are made by people who don't understand and enforced by people who don't care. Evidences of private charity and benevolence are conspicuous wherever you look, but it is all of no use. All along the big roads, far out beyond the East India Docks, there are innumerable institutions founded by generous private enterprise; they jostle one another, and more of them are always being built—houses of every religious denomination, small hospitals, nursing establishments, places of supervised entertain-

ment, sailors' homes, free libraries, everything conceivable, but nothing of permanent value or in any way capable of really lifting the unhappy mass of the people. When I pass them I think of the scenic decorations that we used to smile at in villa gardens in Italy—the painted façade of a sham palace put up to conceal some eyesore that might shock too sensitive visitors. So here the long lines of these philanthropic palliatives that are made of smart red brick or pompous stone, and decorated with marble slabs to commemorate a name, serve to hide abomination from strangers who ride by in trams or on top of buses. But from us who know, they hide nothing. We see through brick and stone right into the abyss. . . .

"Thousands of streets with each house exactly like any other, in every street a thousand people each leading exactly the same life; the heart beaten out of them by monotonous labour, the soul darkened by incessant fear; underpaid, underfed, mercilessly kept from cleanliness and health, foolishly driven to sin or crime; stunted during youth, crushed during their poor maturity, and broken on the wheel of shame when old age overtakes them, when they can work no longer, when their children and their children's children have pushed them from their places in the dock or the factory or the sweater's den. This is not a highly coloured picture of one's excited imagination. It is what the politicians—making some new law—call the undeniable and regrettable state of affairs. Yes, it is the state of affairs two thousand years after the message of peace and goodwill to all men. And nothing can alter it, nothing can ameliorate it, nothing can really *touch* it, until mankind awakes to the impious wickedness of it.

"I talk to our spouting socialists, democrats, and social anarchists, and I wonder they are not red-hot revolutionaries. When they tell me of things actually happening, they talk calmly and soberly; it is *I* who burn and tremble, clench my fists beneath my cape, and go away murmuring menaces of divine wrath. The things that happen—— But they are what I cannot

> speak of, even to you. I write them in my diary so that I may remember, and I dare not look at them again."

The first of three entries in the diary, made during the course of a single week, related to a boy who in the presence of his mother had been beaten by his stepfather. This punishment resulted in serious injury to the child, and it seemed probable that he would be a cripple for the remainder of his days. His offence had been the spending of a penny for his own use (stale bread at a baker's shop) out of the pennies received while begging. The mother and her neighbours said the little rascal had been served quite right, and the world was coming to a strange pass if parents and guardians were to be prevented from teaching young people how to behave.

A second entry described what Churchill saw one afternoon in the Whitechapel Road not far from the London Hospital, whither he had been to visit a sick parishioner. There was a little crowd outside a draper's shop, and from this suddenly burst a young woman of about twenty who began to run as if for her life, hotly pursued by a shop-girl. The crowd followed shouting "Stop thief." The thief ran badly—as did the shop-girl—but nevertheless it was a life-and-death hunt. Soon the hunted one doubled, came across the road, through the traffic, then along the pavement—with the large eyes, sobbing breath, and weakened gait of a sinking stag. All the world laughed, men threw their hats and caps at her, boys tried to trip her heels; but two big policemen were running now, and they presently captured her, marched her off, and all was over. Really a pitiful thing to see when acted before your eyes.

Churchill went with her to the police station; tried to bail her out and failed; tried to get her off when brought before the magistrate and failed; tried to save her from hard labour and failed. When her imprisonment was over he stood at the prison door, and they walked away hand in hand. Without asking Walsden's advice on this occasion, he spent a considerable sum in transplanting the culprit to more hopeful surroundings and starting her on an honest road.

But the point of this entry lay in the exact reasons that the young woman gave him for how and why she had become a thief.

The third entry was about a girl who at the age of fourteen had been hired out by her aunt as domestic servant to "a Chinese gentleman over Lime'us way," the aunt taking a money payment in lieu of future wages. The girl remained in the Chinese quarter for about two years, during which no word was ever heard of her, and then she was brought home and left squatting on the doorstep at night. When Churchill saw her she had been back a good many hours, and she was squatting in a corner of the room with her back to the half-circle of women-neighbours who stood to watch her monotonous antics. Churchill went right into the corner to get a good look at her. She was very thin; her face had a dullish yellow hue without a sign of blood, as of one who has been for a long time kept out of reach of daylight; her eyes were half-closed, with the outer corners seeming to lift spasmodically; and there she squatted, silent, impassive, her hands on her thighs, while she regularly swayed her body from side to side, and at intervals bowed low into the corner, as though before an invisible shrine or altar. "That's all she does," said the aunt. "She won't so much as answer when spoken to. I don't know whatever they've bin doing to her to turn her so stupid, and I wish to goodness I'd never made the engagement for her. She was a bright sensible girl and beginnin' to be of use to me about the house—but you can see she isn't likely to be any help to me now if she don't change her manners. . . . Ethel, drop it. Why can't you drop it, and get up and speak to the kind gentleman? . . . Oh, blast the girl, I shall lose my temper with her before I've done. It makes one sick and giddy to watch her."

Ethel was taken to the Union infirmary, thence drafted on the morrow to a public asylum, where she died in three days.

Concerning this case Churchill had the honour of writing to the Home Secretary, and somebody at the Home Office had the honour of acknowledging the receipt of Mr. Churchill's letter and of saying it should have attention. But then, as the attention seemed too slow in manifesting itself, Churchill wanted to write to the newspapers and get the local M. P. to ask a question in the House. Mr. Walsden, however, thought it unadvisable to do so. There was apparently a movement on foot to inaugurate a Christian mission among the East End Chinese, and Walsden seemed to think that its influence would be far more efficacious than a fuss in the newspapers or chatter in Parliament. "It is easy to *raise* public interest," he said, "but unhappily it is impossible to sustain it. Everything is of the hour. You know, the public are always being hammered at, and one nail drives out another."

In this, as in nearly everything else, Churchill submitted to the wisdom of his vicar. He was faithfully adhering to his determination to treat Walsden as the commanding officer, and obedience and deference were always becoming easier. Nevertheless every check to immediate action, when the desire for action had been caused by righteous indignation, produced in him a most painful sense of impotence. How can one steel oneself to wait patiently for remote and doubtful methods of redress, if weakness cries for help and cruelty struts defiantly? Fits of depression fell upon him, and there were days on which the sense of being thrall to a nightmare dream became well nigh unbearable.

At such times he seemed to see too clearly, to understand too well, to generalise with a tormentingly rapid precision. As he passed people in the streets, he seemed to be able to read their unhappy thoughts, to be unable to prevent himself from reading them. The droop of a bricklayer's shoulders, a haggard glance of a factory hand, as he slouched by, the feeble grin and drunken lurch of a docker stumbling away from a gin-shop, told him stories of entire lives; and he used to think, "Yes, you are all types. You each of you represent thousands and thousands of over-driven beasts who have been given immortal souls but refused the chance of heaven." This labourer is past fifty, and he is typical of success; he has been lucky enough to keep in regular employment; but at any moment now he may lose his job. Then after a long agony of fruitless efforts to save his home, that too may go. He will have passed into the army of casual labour; in a year or so it will be impossible to differentiate him from the lifelong failures; the rapid descent will have begun, and nothing will ever stop it. The wife he once loved will be a dirty bundle of rags sleeping under arches, his sons may be thieves and his daughters something worse, and he himself may drown in a dock basin or die of exhaustion in a ditch, if, like that old fellow, Philbrick, he doesn't hurry to the workhouse.

He thought of the patience, the enduring fortitude, the incessant self-denial displayed by every married couple who, rising above the normal quagmire level, contrived to guard and rear a fairly decent family. Many unquestionably did this, attaining to a fabulous respectability, washing themselves on week-days, coming to church on Sundays. But how few they were—the total numbers of this aristocracy—when compared with the myriads annually destroyed by the precariousness of employment, the prevailing immorality, the diseases bred of dirt, the premature decay of strength and vitality solely due to the vile conditions of their existence. Could nothing be done for them? They themselves asked but one thing, the right to work, the inestimable privilege of wearing themselves out in a merciless toil, so that their more fortunate brothers might eat rich food, ride on the cushioned seats of carriages, and lie long in soft warm beds; and this was asking too much. The boon was denied to them.

His depression used to grow deeper as, passing from the slums, he crossed one of the arteries of traffic. Here he thought of the burden of government laid on top of all else. It was visible wherever one looked—a squad of soldiers marching down to the docks, a spick-and-span sailor to remind one that large navies are not secured without paying for them, stalwart municipal officials with immense horses and newly-painted carts, firemen to prevent fire from cleansing rookeries that ought to have been burnt amidst a nation's rejoicing; postmen to carry letters among those who had no friends to write to them, policemen to move one on if one rested too long against a wall or ventured to sit upon the pavement; tax-collectors in cabs, rate-collectors on bicycles, and a procession of pair-horse wagonettes giving an airing to the best-behaved lunatics from the nearest pauper asylum;—all this extra dead weight carried on the bent backs of the people.

What hope? None, except for the new generations that come sweet and clean from their Creator's hands, each of which in its turn is befouled and wasted. He thought of boys of fourteen like those who enrolled themselves in Walsden's guilds or brigade, creatures as yet unpolluted, full of courage, faith, and trustfulness, the sound material from which good citizens could be made, but just brutally wasted, converted in a few years to cadgers like Richard, or to corner boys willing to cut a throat for a night's drunk. He thought of girls of twelve with eyes like forget-me-nots, with angel-faces; graceful flowers that the wind of heaven has sown on a dunghill, and that soon will be broken, faded, and trampled down into the filth.

And especially the sight of children tore at his heartstrings. Tears came to his eyes, and he did not attempt to restrain them, as he stood watching the children. The street was their nursery, and in the midst of cold and squalor, except when pinched with hunger, they were happy —asking so little of life, only a smile and a ray of sunshine; a little girl of six would be in charge of four younger ones; the baby, thirteen months old, wrapped in a sack as though it were a fur pelisse, proudly riding in a wooden box that was pulled along with a string by the three other mites. When the box turned over in the gutter, the baby howled, but was speedily hushed and taught to be happy again in the loving arms of its deputy-mother. Churchill thought, "But when the streets have ceased to be a nursery and become a school, what will it make of these pupils in ten years?"

After these periods of depression he felt an immense longing for something lovely to look at. It was a craving of the eyes and the mind together. Temptations whispered themselves. It would do him good to take a day off, or at least an afternoon; he might go west and lounge through the National Gallery, soothing his eyes and resting his thoughts by a panorama of lovely pictures. He knew that he must not so pamper himself, and he knew also that he would not yield to the temptation. But about the circuit of his duty he snatched at the enjoyment of regarding anything that was not outwardly ugly and that had not a suggestion of hidden ugliness.

He never went west, but, whenever he could do so without wasting precious time, he went east and got a glimpse of objects pleasingly different from those that always surrounded him—such as the Manor House in the East India Docks Road, the stone tower of St. Ursula's church, or the high garden wall and gabled roof of its pretty rectory. As yet he had not gained the acquaintance of Mr. Verschoyle, the rector, although he was constantly hearing about him, and Walsden frequently promised that he would make this introduction.

Once or twice, too, on spring evenings, when the very air seemed to murmur of pretty places it had passed before it sank fainting in the slums, he roamed through Limehouse, staring at rare old house-fronts, at Norwegian ships with strangely painted poops that stood high and light in the Regent's basin, at corners of streets nearer the water that had been seen and described by Dickens; and, working his way down to one of the landing stages, stood and watched the broad flow of the river. It looked grand and mysterious in the soft evening light, with big steamers looming duskily, the piles of shipping melted and fused in shadow, and the vast Western town filling the horizon with a golden glitter—seeming an enchanted city that darkness and cold might never enter.

At last he made a most unexpected discovery of something that was not ugly, but almost beautiful, in the middle of his own parish. He had passed close to it hundreds of times and never guessed at the possibility of its existence. Not three hundred yards from St. Bede's church there was a turning out of Bevis Street that passed between the walls of a small soap factory and some sheds or warehouses occupied by fishcurers, and he had always supposed that this turning led only to the factory yard; but on exploration he found, beyond the yard, an open space at the end of which stood an old Georgian house.

It was high and narrow, delightful to look at, with iron gate and stone steps before its front door, with the original sash windows and wooden cornice—all very shabby, badly wanting paint, and generally neglected, but in essentials just what it had been nearly two hundred years ago. It reminded him of St. Dunstan's, of Oxford, of all that is old and dignified. And at its side, in a strip of ground not big enough to be called a garden, there was a tree—a real growing plane tree, whose green leaves gently touched the window panes, stretched forth above a wall, and made the sunlight and shadow play joyously upon the stone steps.

"Yes," said Mr. Walsden, when Churchill spoke of the oasis he had found in the desert, "that is Denmark House. It is the last one left of about a dozen similar houses that made up what was called Denmark Square. They are shown in all the old parish maps. The square was demolished about forty years ago, I believe."

"And who lives in Denmark House?"

"The manager of Brown's soap works—Oliver by name. He is a good, strenuous, but unlucky man. I talk to him when I chance to meet him, although he is not of our way of thinking. Wesleyan!"

Churchill after this went often to look at the tree by Denmark House. Whether the leaves were broad and green or tawny and shrivelled, they did one good to look at—they were so different from all other things in St. Bede's.

He longed for pleasant sights; he longed for pleasant sounds. Even the tone of a voice, if refined and musical, startled him and gave him relief. Thus his attention was first called to Miss Vickers.

Gardiner, laid up with influenza, had asked him to receive the visitors and discharged patients belonging to a recently organised extension of the district nursing scheme, and he was doing so to the best of his ability in the vicarage drawing-room. Each visitor possessed a book for the record of her cases, and the entries of outlay for medicaments, food, etc., had to be written up in a diary and confirmed by a signed statement of the patient. As Churchill knew nobody's name, and was ignorant of every detail in the scheme, all this proved to be a rather confusing task until intelligent aid presented itself.

He had noticed a tall, nicely-dressed young woman with brown hair and thoughtful eyes, and presently she came forward and assisted him. As soon as she stood by his side and he observed the delicate refinement of her features, and her modest silent demeanour when not speaking, he understood that she must be to all intents and purposes a lady. It would have been a shock had her voice sounded ugly and common, but in fact it was charmingly gentle and sweet.

When all the business had been transacted, she asked him to give her out a new nursing book for herself, and he did so, first writing down her name.

"Let me see, what is your name?"

"Vickers—Lilian Vickers."

And he wrote it carefully—"Miss Lilian Vickers"—telling himself the while that he must remember the name and inquire later who and what she was.

"Thank you."

She took her book and went away, he watching her meditatively. Her face was pale, and you would not perhaps call it pretty, but the slimness and gracefulness of her figure, her quietly tasteful dress, and her easy movements, made her extraordinarily conspicuous as she passed through the other women who clustered about the drawing-room door.

Afterwards he saw her once or twice in church. Who was she? A West-ender? The daughter of a doctor? Anyhow she was different—like the tree in this, that a glimpse of her was pleasant.

He saw her talking to Mrs. Walsden, and he fully intended to inquire about her; but he never did so. In the hurry and stress of his life all trifles got brushed aside. There was no time for anything but solid work.

So the long months passed, and during eighteen of them he was absent from St. Bede's only for two visits of a week-end to the boys' seaside camp and for twenty-four hours spent with his mother at St. Dunstan's.

And still, in spite of familiarity with its inexorable nature, the burden of a people's pain lay upon him. He could not bear it strongly, yet he might not put it down. Except in sleep he was forced to try to carry it.

The only sustaining thought was his recognition of the effects of religion. The living force of religion showed itself plainly day after day. But here again there was the same sense of continually baffled endeavour.

St. Bede's parish contained about thirteen thousand inhabitants, and probably only thirteen hundred could be claimed as in any way church-people. Ten per cent. of the mass! And in all neighbouring parishes, throughout the East End, one might say that no higher percentage could be found. Not more than one person in ten was really and truly a Christian believer. Only the well-to-do could, as it were, afford to be religious; religion was the final stamp upon an unusual prosperity; in lives that knew no leisure religion could not find a place. Or, in other words, those who most needed it might never have it. This, too, was denied them.

A terrible thought—the more terrible, the more clearly one saw what religion can do and what it ought to mean.

One winter's afternoon he was in the office room at the Institute, where Walsden sat at a table doling out relief tickets, attending to applications for hospital aid, taking the claimants each in turn. The room remained almost full, the pressure at the table was great, and the beads of perspiration on the vicar's forehead became little fountains that he mopped up hastily with his bandana handkerchief. A young girl on a chair wept plaintively, and Churchill pointed her out to Walsden.

"Now, my dear," said Walsden, "don't snivel. Your turn will come directly. What ticket was it you asked for? . . . . Speak up. I can't hear. Really, whatever it is, you must wait patiently."

"But father will be dead."

"What's that you say?"

Churchill went over to the girl, brought her sobbing to the table, and she explained that she wished a priest would come to her dying father.

"Why didn't you tell me so at once?"

"I did, sir."

"Did you, my dear?" said Walsden, very kindly. "Then I fear I was not attending—or it has slipped my memory. You see we are unusually busy. But now, when you say 'dying,' do you mean merely ill, or that he is on the point of death?"

"Doctor said he'd be gone before dusk;" and the girl moaned and rocked herself.

"What is your father's name?"

"Thomas Rinch."

"Oh, dear. I know him well. Your father is an honest godfearing man."

"Always bin to church regular," sobbed the girl.

Edward Churchill asked and obtained leave to go with the girl to her father's home, while Walsden went on distributing the soup and coal tickets.

They were in time. The man was still alive. As always on such occasions he had served as a little private exhibition for the whole street; from an early hour female neighbours had been going in and out; at mid-day men had come from their work to have a peep at him, and now, *in extremis,* he lay surrounded by curious and attentive spectators.

Churchill, not without difficulty, cleared the room of everybody except the wife and the daughter, gave the last comforts of the Church, and stayed till all was over.

Then he came away, walking very slowly through the streets and feeling a new and strange tranquillity of thought. At the Institute he begged to be excused from all duties until the morrow. He could work no more that day among the living; he must sorrow and be joyful for one who had been here a little while and now again had gone.

Alone in his bare cold room at Bentley House he passed the whole evening praying and meditating, except for half an hour that he took for writing a letter to St. Dunstan's. He said in this letter:—

> "The face was lovely to look upon, lined and furrowed, but with the pathetic dignity that only comes after pain that has been bravely borne. . . . I am sure that he understood me, although he could not speak. I watched his eyes, and they were full of comprehension, and he made slight movements with his hand.
>
> "But, mother, he spoke just before he died. He was propped up high in the bed because of his trouble in breathing, and all at once his head came forward, he looked straight in front of him with widely opened eyes, and his whole face lit up as if the light of a lamp had been turned upon it. And he spoke a single word—'Wonderful!'
>
> "And, mother dear, no one who saw this could have doubted. The gates of heaven had opened for him, and he was looking into the blessed abode. I went on praying with dread and joy; for I *felt* that the spirit of God had descended into the room, and I *knew* that the man was saved. He said the word again, twice—'Wonder-

ful, wonderful!' Then he sank back, dead. When I closed his eyes they were dull, like tarnished glass. That did not matter. The vision of heaven was in them.

"And, oh, mother, my own dear mother, is it not *wonderful?* What other word could he have used? Is it not wonderful and glorious that the grave need have no terrors, that what seems the end is but a beginning, that soon we may be where there are no partings, no regrets, nothing but infinite peace?"

XVI

Of a sudden his burden had become less heavy. Perhaps it was that deathbed scene which changed the sombre drift of all his thoughts. But certainly he was happier, and scrutinising darkness could always now detect some gleams of light.

When he looked at the distress and pain that lay on all sides, he saw, too, the love and the self-sacrifice. If there was much cruelty there was also much kindness. Among the more fortunate there was immense generosity. They lent one another their money, their goods, their service, and they did it freely and ungrudgingly. The very poor went on giving until they could give no more. As to the most miserable, the fallen and the wicked, the outcast and the rejected—well, these were exactly like the people that Christ chose to live among. And the quite obvious thought came that Christ never seemed to be really distressed by the material grievance of their condition; he founded a brotherhood of love, but he sketched no plans for a socially comfortable community; he accepted all the horrible inequality of rich and poor; he did not even try to free the slaves.

Christ accepted it all as it was—or at least showed no passionate hurry to change it. He had brought the great message from heaven, and henceforth the earth could take care of itself.

Churchill said to himself, "I have been sinking into the folly of unbelievers." And he thought again, but in an entirely different manner, of the ceaseless attempts to ameliorate the existing state of affairs that are made by economists, politicians, writers, and talkers. All that they can do, lavishly aided by the benevolent and the charitable, is but a drop in the ocean. And knowing that it is so, many good men cannot sleep at night because of the suffering of mankind. The horror of it, together with their own impotence, haunts them, and ultimately kills them perhaps.

He thought of these philanthropists and of their despair-ing cry, feeling ashamed but scarcely now remembering if he had ever echoed it. He knew it perhaps only because one hears it so often: "The world is too ugly. The suffering is too much. Despair."

Yes, but the answer is simple. He marvelled at the folly of the cry. These men must be unbelievers. In truth one might despair, if it was a question of only one life here and now. But as there is another life, to which this is only a probation, why despair?

And even here below, we are not standing still. We are *not* as we were two thousand years ago. Here below the love is strengthening, spreading—nothing can stop the progress. Christ sowed the seed in the heart of the world, and the blossoming tree cannot die; it must spread, and spring up higher and higher. There is hope on all sides. No real despair is felt among those who are suffering. Only the doubting lookers-on cannot bear it, and sometimes go mad from the hideous sights.

The sense of being lost in the shifting crowd of strangers passed away from him. He knew more and more people personally. Sometimes, going through the costers' market, he seemed to be acquainted with everybody there. Whole streets talked to him—the church-folk as to a friend, the others in genial recognition of a now familiar face. "Afternoon, guv'nor." "Fine day, sir." "I say, mister. 'Arf a minute ago there was a young bloke looking fer you; one o' yer Brigade boys; carroty-'eaded boy that b'longs to Brown's."

At the vicarage, where he generally took his evening meal, he was quite at home; trustfully admiring Walsden, and not only fond of Mrs. Walsden, Gardiner, and the servants, but even fond of Mr. Smart. He had tried hard not to judge Smart severely, and he had been rewarded. After hearing things narrated by Walsden and observing other things for himself, he would have been sorry indeed had he recklessly condemned this large, soft, and outwardly common man because of his one constitutional or hereditary weakness. Much, much good lay hid in Smart. Though poor, he was not greedy of money; if he loved ease, he did not take it; if he shirked the battlefield, he was faithful and untiring with the wounded and the sick. In his last curacy he might have married a rich woman, but, although not bound by any vows of celibacy, he refused marriage for the sake of the priestly ideal. Soon he would be leaving St. Bede's, to take up work just as arduous and unromantic in a provincial town; and Churchill felt genuinely sorry that his round face and rather smug smile were about to vanish from the scene.

If either Smart or Gardiner had been capable of entertaining the pettiness of jealousy, both of them, ere this, might perhaps have wished that Churchill himself would speedily withdraw. People who used to go to them for ghostly counsel now went to him. Women and boys in increasing numbers, and many men, too, demanded preparation from him before attending the Communion Service, and but for the advice or explicit requests of Walsden, he would have developed and expanded the practice of confession to the utmost of his power. On this matter he and Walsden had many talks. He did not agree with Walsden's views—so far as this special matter was concerned—either with regard to doctrine or policy; he thought them wrong; but he submitted and obeyed.

Walsden was more grateful than Churchill guessed for such acquiescence to the superior authority. Talking to his wife, he once said, "Emily, the best thing about Churchill is that he doesn't like giving in—no, he hates it and yet he does it."

"He is an extremely nice young man," said Mrs. Walsden. "Quite the nicest we have ever had."

Walsden scratched his beard and laughed contentedly. "Yes, and do you know, it is lucky that he bends to me, because the time is not far off when he will be strong enough to break me."

"Henry, what do you mean?" Mrs. Walsden was indignant and puzzled.

"I mean the hold he is getting on the parish."

"Oh, that is nonsense," said Mrs. Walsden quite warmly. "No one can *ever* be anything here but you."

"You don't hear what I hear. It is all Mr. Churchill nowadays. It is 'Mr. Churchill told me not to;' 'Mr. Churchill wouldn't like it;' 'Mr. Churchill said I was to pray for my enemies.' . . . Emily, if he set himself to do it, he could take them all away from me. But he won't attempt to do it."

"I should think not indeed;" and Mrs. Walsden tossed her head, and her mild eyes flashed fire.

"And he won't have *time* to do it either. Emily, we can't hope to keep him long. It would be too much to hope—but, oh, my dear, how I shall miss him!"

"*I* shan't—if he has such presumptuous ideas."

"He has none;" and Walsden spoke with most unusual slowness and thoughtfulness. "Emily, I see great things ahead of Edward Churchill. Up to now I believe his life has been a constant fight. It is a fight that tells its story in his face. I saw it was there directly I saw *him,* but I couldn't read the story. I asked him why he looked older than his years, and he said he did not know. Quite true. I don't think he knows now."

"And now I don't know what you mean," said Mrs. Walsden, picking up a basket of socks.

"I mean—— But, never mind. You're busy, dear. I too. There's something I had to attend to, and it has completely gone;" and Walsden roused himself and began to bustle. "Yes, Churchill—only this. When a man of that quality conquers himself, he can conquer all the world. He becomes like iron—all it meets must bend or break. . . . Tell Miss Lacy that the auditor's report will be ready to-morrow."

In fact, although Edward Churchill did not as yet know it, what had happened twice already—at school and at the University—had happened again, and on a larger scale, at St. Bede's. He was an influence.

This became patent to all but himself when he began to preach. He had prepared a series of sermons on the Efficacy of Prayer, and he started delivering them at week-day evening services. Gradually he filled the church. He told the people to pray for one another; he said it was an aid that they could always give, and they were to give it always; instead of coming to gape at the sick man and make a raree-show of him, they were to pray for him while at their work. They were to pray for those they loved and for those they hated; and the love would deepen and the hate would die. "Pray for him who evilly entreats you, ask that he may be redeemed from his wickedness and taught to act as a member of the brotherhood of Christ. And listen to this, believe it, because it is the truth: If your prayers do *him* no good, they will do *you* good. Try it; put it to the test, and tell me if it is not true. After such prayer you will feel that you are better and stronger; the poison of angry thought will have been driven out of your blood, your brains will seem to have been washed in clean water, your hearts will beat to a steadier measure; you will be more like yourselves."

He took no pride but an immense pleasure in the success of his sermons. When he went up into the pulpit and looked down at the toil-worn faces, he found that all which once seemed ugly had utterly gone. This place of simple worship seemed homely, friendly, congruous to its purpose and its aims; the yellowish bricks and clumsy woodwork had been rendered innocuous by familiarity, the tessellated pavement glowed warmly and cheerfully in the gaslight, and by day the gaudy crudeness of the painted glass no longer afflicted his eyes.

Soon Walsden came to him with an open letter, and, looking at it rather ruefully, said, "Father Halliday wants you to go over and preach at Poplar. He'll send a man to take your place. It's the first offer of the kind that has ever reached us from that high and mighty quarter—and, well, my immediate inclination was to ask him to keep his impudence to polish his buckled shoes with. But, of course, I should like you to go. It's the right thing to do. Yes, I wish to say yes."

Churchill preached at Poplar, and then with Walsden's approval complied with requests for a sermon at Plaistow and other parishes as far eastward as Leytonstone.

Amongst the churches that he preached in—the one to which Walsden dispatched him with the most cordial satisfaction—was St. Ursula's; and now at last he met that Mr. and Mrs. Verschoyle of whom he had heard so much, and was privileged to pass through the gate in the high garden wall at which he had looked so often.

The rectory was more charming than he had imagined when scrutinising its gabled roof and upper windows from the top of a tram. Coming out of the roar of traffic, leaving the mean shops, the sad crowd, the dirty pavement, and passing through an enchanted wicket, you saw before you a modest old-fashioned country house, with carriage drive, wide porch, and well-treed garden, beyond which, and at a considerably lower level, ran a stretch of water that connected one of the many ship-basins with a neighbouring canal. Inside, the house was homelike, peaceful, pretty. But more charming than all this were the people who lived in the house.

Verschoyle was a tall thin man of perhaps fifty, and yet when he laughed his clean-shaven face seemed that of a boy; he had soft luminous eyes, and their expression changed rapidly, now humorous, now grave, but never hard; in manner he was easy, natural, but always priestlike. Mrs. Verschoyle as a young girl must have been very beautiful, and indeed she was still beautiful at the age of thirty-five: a woman of the Italian type, with the nobly chiselled mask of antique ideals, dark hair, and an olive complexion. When in repose a fleeting sadness showed about her lips and eyes; when she talked the light and the life in her was glorious. All the church-people of St. Ursula's loved her; she could understand all, she forgave all; she had a power of intuition that is very rare, a power that first startles and then delights. An attribute which she shared with her husband, perhaps the strongest characteristic of both, was that without delay and without question they seemed to give one their ripe friendship—yet, not as common people giving that which they know is of little value and therefore need not be withheld, but as if acting on a firm belief that the gift would be deserved.

Thus they gave their friendship to Edward Churchill, and he thought that it was of inestimable value. He came back to the rectory again and again, and they always made him welcome. They supplied nearly everything for which he had craved. All here were staunch Catholics, thinking exactly as he did and able to express their thoughts without the least reserve. It was a joy to snatch some brief respite, jump upon a tram, and find himself in the rectory drawing-room. Listening here was as pleasant as talking; just to watch was pleasant. The young priests who lived here wore cassocks and birettas; their faces were fine and mild, yet really strong, like the rector's face; and in their intercourse with him and his wife they seemed to be brothers. All were so happy. The atmosphere was full of a glorious untroubled faith into which fuss and hurry could not obtrude itself. The whole thing was spiritual when compared with Walsden's harassed household, where the talk ran so much on violent effort, bitter disappointment, and stern refusal to admit defeat. Here, when they spoke of difficulties they all seemed peacefully conscious of the irresistible force that works behind our puny endeavours. Walsden's was a noble ardour; this was a splendid confidence.

"Now sit quietly," Mrs. Verschoyle used to say, smiling at him. "Don't pull out your watch in that agitated way; don't frown and start, and jump up as if you had been shot. Whatever you have to do, there will be time enough to do it."

And he noticed how slowly and thoughtfully one of the young priests took his biretta from the piano, turned it round and round in his white hands, lingered a little while chatting, and then glided away. Most haste less speed perhaps. At St. Ursula's contemplation and meditation seemed to be possible. And if one got unduly rattled, one went into a retreat. He heard them speak of retreats often. "Brother Davenport is doing a retreat at Reigate." "Father Mathison will have finished his retreat by Sunday."

When here, he fell into their ways. He lived for the moment, and the wish to be in two or three places at once was forgotten.

So truly the rectory was for him a retreat. He did a retreat of an hour or an hour and a quarter at a time, liking it best when he could sit alone with Mrs. Verschoyle on summer afternoons. It was rest and enjoyment to be in this beautiful room—made beautiful by taste and not by wealth; to look at the chintz-covered sofas and chairs, the pretty china, the flowers, and, through an open window and under the branches of trees, at the garden sloping downward to brown water dappled with patches of yellow sunlight. And, oh, the sweet boon of silence! Here, at the back of the house, all seemed so still. Not a murmur of the traffic reached one, and the faint shouts of men passing with a barge upon the water sounded but for a moment and then like music.

He used to talk to her dreamily, of his mother, his ambitions, his ideas for new sermons; and he loved to talk, he loved to listen. Her voice, the mere sight of her, did him good.

"Well, Christian," she would say, with a frank, kind smile, as he came in, "how are you getting on with the giants? You've left the Slough of Despond far behind you, anyhow."

Quite early in their friendship she and her husband had begun to call him Christian, but they employed the name only when there were no other people present. He had asked her why. "Is it because you think me faint-hearted and easily frightened?"

"No," she said. "You are like Christian because you are going a long journey, and you are going to suffer many things, but you will get there in the end. But that's not the reason," and she laughed pleasantly. "See for yourself." Then she brought from her writing-table a print of Sherburn's fanciful picture of Christian dressed in armour. "Have you ever seen that face? The first time you came here my husband and I had the idea that we knew you, that we had often seen you before. We racked our memories. Then all at once Wilfrid jumped up and said, 'Christian! Sherburn's Christian'!"

Many other visitors came to the rectory; and, meeting them, Churchill was unconsciously touching the fringe of a circle of the most aristocratic Catholicism. These droppers-in were for the most part priests—friends of St. Ursula's curates, members of orders and wandering communities, or representatives of austere brotherhoods who made excursions into the world and then returned to the normally severe discipline of their Houses; but there were some laymen also, young men of easy address and polished manners, who, except for their costume, were just like clerics. All were celibates, and certainly most of the priests, if not the laymen, too, had taken solemn vows of chastity. Mr. and Mrs. Verschoyle not only approved of celibacy, but spoke of it with enthusiasm, delightfully oblivious both of them that they were always presenting it in its most attractive and highest form, the bliss of married life.

These people talked often about the church of the Crucifixion in Melford Street, its eloquent vicar, Father Bryan, its deserved popularity, and its varied offices. They advised Churchill to go there without delay, politely giving him to understand that not to have attended High Mass at Father Bryan's was at once the loss of a great pleasure and an ignorance that verged on being a solecism.

Then somebody offered to procure tickets for Mrs. Verschoyle, Churchill, and the youngest of St. Ursula's curates; and one Sunday all three of them went together and heard Schubert's Mass.

Churchill's delight and joyful emotion were intense. He came away fortified. And thence onwards he went there from time to time alone—making it his great treat, forcing himself to work doubly hard in order to earn and deserve the treat.

At this period Father Bryan's church was at the very height of its vogue. At ten o'clock—half an hour before Matins began—carriages came rolling out of the stately Mayfair squares to set down what the newspapers used to call the highest representatives of rank and fashion, and soon the courtyard gates in narrow little Melford Street were as handsomely blocked as though the attraction had been a dress rehearsal of some new opera. Many policemen were required to regulate the traffic and help you through the crowd of sightseers who had gathered to gape at the nobs. Admission was by ticket only. In the courtyard grave and courtly men of the world examined your credentials; then you were passed on into the church porch, where you surrendered your cards of entry. In the church itself pleasant debonair young gentlemen took charge of you, dividing the two sexes, conducting women to one side and men to the other, whispering, smiling, beckoning, and finally giving you, somewhere among the tightly packed throng, your cane-seated chair and square praying-mat. There was excitement and anxiety as closing time drew near; for no mercy was ever shown to late-comers. At 10:25 the church doors shut, one heard the keys turn in the locks, and one knew that outside, the courtyard was full of the disappointed and the ticketless. After Matins the doors opened again. A few people went out, but many more surged in, packing every available corner, exhausting every square inch of standing room, for the Mass.

The church, considered merely as a building, was "the last word" in ecclesiastical architecture and decoration. Clusters of polished stone pillars with ornate capitals supported the unusually high roof; the wall on the women's side was given over to a series of fresco pictures, while the men's wall had narrow windows with low-toned glass; there was a small but rich little chapel snuggling behind the pulpit and beneath the screened tubes of the organ—a very powerful and costly instrument. All this seemed fine enough, but the real splendours had been reserved for the choir and sanctuary. The altar stood high above its spacious wide steps; all columns, tracery, or screen work to either side of the choir were gilded, with richly-glowing colour as a background, and the entire eastern wall was a blaze of gold mosaic. Windows, high up to the south and north, that could not be seen from the body of the church, admitted a white but delicately tempered light, but only at a level well above the altar, so that it softened the fiery glow of decoration, and made all that might seem heavy or solid change to graceful, almost ethereal luminance.

At first Churchill noticed little of such matters. Thrilled and captivated by the new experience, he could scarcely observe anything outside the essential satisfaction furnished by his surroundings. But now, during Matins at least, he was fully cognisant of minor interests.

He noticed the congregation—even studied it attentively. The sleek and robust young men who acted as vergers were confident, easy content with themselves and yet not self-conscious. They seemed to be friends of everybody, they stooped to tap people on the shoulders and murmur amicably; they sometimes kept one hand in a trousers pocket as they showed people to seats—they were like the bridegroom's chums helping at a wedding. On different occasions he saw seven or eight men that he had known at Oxford, and, talking to them afterwards in the courtyard, they made much of him as one with whom they were glad to renew relations. Amongst them was a man called Richard Hayling, a man much older than Churchill, who used to come to stay with a fellow of All Souls, and did not then appear to be very religious. Now it was easy to see that, in spite of his smart clothes and still worldly manner, religion had become the main interest of his life. He was a handsome man, with a large bird-like nose, dark hair rapidly turning grey, and keen inquiring eyes. Evidently a person of importance here, he took Churchill under his wing, introducing him to Father Bryan, and promising him that he should have tickets whenever he wanted them. Hayling also said that some one had told him of Churchill's gifts as a preacher. Another man whom Churchill had never seen before, but whom he immediately recognised, was the Duke of Danesborough. The windows of Oxford photographers had been full of portraits of this celebrated undergrad, and, although he had been down for some time, the talk still ran upon his rows with dons, policemen, and bookmakers; his steeplechasers and hunters, the coach on which he drove actresses, his rooms by the archway at Christ Church where he gave fabulously elaborate and painfully riotous luncheon parties. A sun-burnt, strongly-built, even beefy nobleman, leaving traditions behind him to lead youth astray—and yet here he was, Sunday after Sunday, taking round an offertory bag and looking grave, dignified, princely, or kneeling on his little mat, all his ducal pomp forgotten in humble and whole-hearted devotion.

When Churchill glanced at the female part of the congregation, he saw unmistakably the effects of wealth and luxury upon outward aspect. In a sense, many of these richly dressed, gracious, and graceful women were extremely beautiful. The faces of young and old all seemed mature. Each seemed a complete, well-finished specimen, with nothing pinched or stinted in colour, line, or size. They were, of course, all of them very highly nourished; their complexions, even when waxily pale, suggested a full supply of blood, and the curves of their cheeks and the contours of their figures, although so pretty, were very firm. To his eye—perhaps merely from an association of ideas natural enough—their charms were a little too earthly. Something dull, lifeless, or inert marred the loveliness. He could see no one with the spiritual beauty of Mrs. Verschoyle, nor one with an expression and general air as interesting and subtly attractive as had been shown by that Miss Vickers.

Thinking this, he remembered that Miss Vickers came no more to St. Bede's church, and that he never met her at the Institute or in the streets. She had vanished without his ever having asked those questions concerning her character, history, social status. She had been a pleasant apparition and no more. He remembered, too, that he had not for some time paid a visit to the tree by Denmark House. He had forgotten the green leaves and the pale face together.

But however widely his mind wandered, it came back and concentrated itself the moment the Mass began. As the first chords of noble music struck one's ear, one became absorbed, entranced. One thought of the great and glorious mystery, and one thought of nothing else. Truly, however, as the celebration continued, thought with most of the worshippers was obliterated and they became purely receptive, storing pleasure and peace through eyes and ears.

But with Churchill, up to a certain period, there was always a strong mental acquiesence, a latent activity of thought, that seized and sifted each incoming message from the sense channels. Thus, while he listened and watched, taking joy in the play of light and colour, the mauve and amber and gold of the priests' vestments, the solemnity of tall acolytes holding the immense candles, the bowings and genuflexions, the advances and the withdrawals, the low murmurs and the loud bursts of song, some deep inner voice of the intellect seemed to heighten his joy by its sanction and approval, as though it had been saying, "This satisfies me. This is what I desired. This is what I have been asking for ever since I was a child and first began to think."

But after a point, as the apotheosis approached, he passed swiftly into the realm of unreasoning emotion. The sound of the bell thrilled him; the odour and smoke of the incense was rolling towards him; the eastern wall began to flash and tremble. Soft beams of sunlight made a heavenly radiance high above the priestly heads and almost prostrate forms; then down below all seemed to grow misty, a glittering of gold seen through veils of many-tinted cloud, in which one understood rather than really saw the Elevation of the Host. And thence onward it was adoration and delight. It was the supreme ecstasy.

In the evening, seated at supper in the bare and shabby dining-room of St. Bede's vicarage, he was begged to describe what he had witnessed at the West End, and he always did so freely. Mrs. Walsden, standing up before the cold mutton, would stop carving and vaguely brandish the big knife, so astonished did she feel; Walsden, engrossed, inadvertently helped himself thrice to the Barking pickles; Gardiner sighed almost enviously; and Mr. Nape, the new curate, who was a shy, tittering kind of person, gasped and spluttered while he drank his ginger beer.

"As many men as women! How *can* he manage it?"

"Crowded for Matins too! *Well!*"

Churchill used to hand round the church magazine that he had brought with him from the marvellous West End establishment, and, as this passed from one to another, items were read aloud to a chorus of ejaculation.

"They've made a League for the young ladies at three of the fashionable drapers' shops," read out Gardiner.

"They get up dances for them," read Mr. Nape. "Oh! They arrange *theatricals* for them. Fancy!" And he tittered.

"I see," said Mrs. Walsden, nursing the magazine, "that he gave twenty guineas to Poplar. . . . And ten guineas to the Canning Town fund. He didn't happen to think of *us.*"

Walsden took the magazine from her, and, always ready to ignore his food, read assiduously.

"Could one credit it? They take nearly three hundred pounds at a single offertory. Why, think what that would come to! . . . Stay—here it is in black and white. Their offertories last year exceeded five thousand pounds." He held the magazine above his head, as though to prevent Mrs. Walsden from snatching it, and stared at her fixedly. "Emily, do you hear? Five thousand pounds! Positively, it makes one's mouth water."

XVII

Some of the young men that Edward Churchill met in the West had offered to visit him in the East. "We will," they declared. "On my word, I mean it. . . . You know, Churchill has the worst slum of all. Isn't it sporting of him? We mean to look him up. . . . We will, old chap. Hayling shall fix a date with you. After dinner, of course."

And one Saturday night they really did come to the club—a largish party of youthful bloods, personally conducted by Richard Hayling.

The visit was not altogether successful. Walsden did not take to the visitors, and soon grew huffy and standoffish with them. Obviously they had merely come sightseeing. They chattered gaily at the club, looking absurdly big and strong and prosperous as they moved about among the undersized East-enders, and inciting undue noise and laughter.

"Tell us some more. Go on—out with it. So you propped him one in the eye—ripping!"

Edward heard their silly talk in all directions, but it could not be checked. "Algy!" one of them cried excitedly. "Come over here and talk to a delightful cove I've found. He has just done time."

They had fastened upon a coster, an unworthy young man, and Churchill heard them plying him with silly questions. "Which is the rummiest street? Saturday! You have all sorts of larks, don't you? Can't you show us the larks?" Churchill tried in vain to get them away from their coster. They went off with him—to see the sights, to look in at the music-hall, to stand treat at whelk stalls, buy hot potatoes, and watch people eat hokey-pokey. "Show us your donahs too. Trot out the gals. Bring the ladies. Let 'em *all* come."

Churchill looked round, and only Richard Hayling was left. He felt ashamed of his frivolous crew, and insisted on staying at the club till nearly the end of the evening.

Walsden frowned, and going out to the pavement, stood there, as if the interior of his club had been spoilt for him.

But within a few days all the foolish visitors had sent Churchill cheques to be used for any good purpose that he pleased; and when he handed this money to St. Bede's general purposes fund, Walsden beamed, rubbed his hands together, and was again well content.

A little while after this Churchill received an invitation to preach an evening sermon at the Church of the Crucifixion. Walsden again begged him to accept the invitation, and talked much about it at meals.

"Have you heard the news? Our star preacher is required in Mayfair now. We shall have him summoned to the Chapel Royal or Buckingham Palace before we can look round;" and he spoke to Churchill facetiously and yet wistfully. "I fear me, this is the beginning of the end for poor old St. Bede's. They won't let us keep you to ourselves; they mean to get you away as soon as they can." And he turned to his wife, "Emily, you must fetch out your best bonnet and mantle, and go and hear him thunder at the swells."

Mrs. Walsden said that she must wait for a new bonnet before she dared to face Mayfair, and, moreover, she had her sewing-club on the evening in question.

At this week-day evening service Father Bryan's congregation was drawn from other classes of society than those that mustered in such strength on Sundays. The hour clashed with dinner-time, and the fashionable world was scarcely represented at all. In lieu of the smart young men there were clerks, shop-assistants, business people from the suburbs; and the women's side of the church was sparsely occupied by shop girls, typists, governesses, and—to Father Bryan's great pride—a few chorus girls, or ballet dancers, who would be presently pulling on silk tights and painting their faces in the dressing-rooms of a popular theatre or music-hall.

Churchill preached once more on prayer, and at first felt nervous and uncertain of himself, finding the management of his voice difficult, seeming to bark or bellow each time that he tried to give emphasis to a phrase, but getting on better as soon as he understood that, thanks to the perfect acoustic properties of the building, every word would carry without effort to the furthest corner. After the service Father Bryan thanked him warmly, assured him that he had been quite a success, and begged him to come into the adjacent vicarage for some late dinner.

Churchill excused himself. He had to get back to St. Bede's.

"Then good-night—or rather *au revoir;* for I count on your coming again. I'll drop you a line. Yes, I'll write to you to-morrow—or the day after."

The promised letter, duly arriving and being submitted for consideration, made Mr. Walsden skip round his study, shout, and wave his arms in jubilation. Father Bryan asked Churchill to preach upon the efficacy of prayer on a Sunday morning, and to accept the offertory for St. Bede's.

"When does he say?" cried Walsden. "Fortnight. That will be July the third. The height of the London season. The cream of his offertories. Oh, where is that magazine? Churchill, how can we thank you? My wife will shed tears of joy," and he went shouting into the hall. "Emily, famous news! Emily! Where is Bryan's magazine? I want to see what they took the first Sunday in July last year."

It was the finest possible congregation that Churchill surveyed from the low octagonal pulpit. Outside the sun shone, the streets were clean and dry, kind people who did not wish to bring out their horses and coachmen could safely walk to church; all might wear their best clothes without distress of mind. That regular attendant, the Duke of Danesborough, was in his place; Hayling had come; the young men were in great force; the ladies overflowed their allotted space, and a few of them had to be insinuated near the windows on the men's side.

Churchill felt complete confidence. Beginning quietly he immediately got the right pitch of voice, and was sustained throughout the sermon by a conviction, equivalent to certainty, that he held and interested his auditors. He wound up by telling them that death-bed story of the man who said "Wonderful!"; and when he ceased speaking, there was a sympathetic rustle, a wave of very slight movement that seemed to come rolling towards him right through the church until it broke against the stone of the pulpit—a manifestation that plainly represented the round after round of applause which preachers can never hear while they remain in consecrated places. When he went back to his choir stall he was glowing, excited, joyously proud. He did not really need the friendly, approving glance of Father Bryan to tell him that he had made a complete, an unusually big success. Presently, during the interval between the offices, when he and all the clergy were in the vestry, he listened to many congratulations, and would have had more but for the fact that Bryan was busily devoting himself to a young Colonial bishop who had arrived for the Mass.

But he thought no more of himself after they had reentered the church; and at the end of the Mass he was tranquil, normal, innocently happy. If glory there were, he had given the glory where all glory is due.

Father Bryan had insisted that to-day he should stay for luncheon, and, as he walked through a cloister leading from the church to the adjacent vicarage, he thought how curiously the ground plan and general arrangement of the buildings resembled St. Bede's, and yet how astoundingly different everything was in all other respects. Most of the guests, making their way through the open courtyard, had already gathered in a large soberly decorated room that might be called a library if you looked at its book-cases, or a drawing-room if you merely considered its luxuriousness. To-day, as rarely happened, ladies were of the party, and Richard Hayling told Churchill confidently that he thought their admission a mistake. Bryan's luncheon parties were delightful informal affairs at which men talked freely, and the presence of women, in his opinion, not only puts an irksome restraint on one's choice of topics, but infallibly destroys intelligent conversation on *any* subject. Having said this, he at once introduced Churchill to a Lady Eliza Somebody, her pretty daughter, and Miss Venning, the famous actress.

Among the male guests, as well as one of Bryan's clergy and the Colonial bishop, there were the Duke of Danesborough, the editor of a daily newspaper, a very well-known Radical M. P., and old Lord Menston, revered in all Catholic circles as the munificent patron, if not the actual originator, of the Bournemouth Fraternity; and in regard to the rest of the men one felt instinctively that each was without question a personage of some importance, by reason of wealth, rank, or individual power. If he had been nobody and had never done anything remarkable, he could not possibly be there.

Father Bryan took Churchill from the actress and Hayling in order to present him to the bishop, and these three stood for a little while talking together quite away from all the others. After more compliments about the sermon Bryan told the bishop he ought to have come at Matins. He had missed something worth hearing. "I think you are so wise, Churchill in——" Then he hastily moved off to receive another lady.

He came back directly. "What was I saying? Oh, yes, half the bother with brilliant young men like yourself is that they will address themselves to points of dogma instead of to broad principles. Now that is a mistake."

Edward Churchill said it was what he himself had felt, and indeed had told Walsden.

But at the name of Walsden Father Bryan made something like a wry face. Then, with an effort, he spoke genially. "I have never met Mr. Walsden. But you really like him?"

"Oh, yes."

Father Bryan laughed. "Then I'll like him for your sake. By the by, you'll be wanting to know what the offertory was. I must ask. You have immense poverty out there?"

"Immense."

"Just so. . . . Ah, here is that naughty Lady Eva. Always late! . . . Lady Eva, don't trouble to apologise: because we have *not* been waiting for you. But now that you *have* turned up, you can lead the way into the other room."

At the luncheon table Churchill sat next to the Duke of Danesborough, who was very amiable, and across whom the actress leaned and talked volubly. She flashed her large eyes, gasped, and laid both hands upon her heart in a pretty, exaggerated, theatrical manner when speaking of the sermon. On Churchill's other side the newspaper editor was asking old Menston about a recent debate of the Lords, and in all directions there were light questions and answers, gaiety and laughter.

Churchill did not notice how the ladies at the far end of the table were looking at him, nor guess that they were talking about him.

"Of course," said one of them, "it's how nice he looks rather than what he says."

"Yes, with such a face——"

"But I liked his voice too."

And they all agreed that they greatly admired his voice as well as his appearance, and also his extraordinary self-possession.

"Father Bryan says he is absurdly young. But something has *aged* him. I am certain there is some tremendous romance in that man's life. He had some great love affair, and that sent him into the Church."

"Bosh," said Hayling. "If you want to know the ugly truth, he is a confirmed woman-hater."

"Yes, *now* possibly," said the lady. "But that is since his great disappointment," and she laughed gaily.

"Poor lamb," said Lady Eva. "I hope he'll be consoled one day. I'm quite sure he'll find people willing to try."

Hayling unobtrusively turned his shoulder and talked to the man next him. He was more than ever persuaded that a mistake had been made in admitting ladies.

They smoked at the end of the meal, and this was the first time that Churchill had ever seen women with cigarettes in their mouths.

He was not in the least shocked. He had dropped quite easily into his place among these strange people and new surroundings, and he felt conscious of the charm exercised by the whole thing. Listening to the newspaper editor and the Radical Member of Parliament as they held forth about politics, or to the actress as she narrated the plot of a forthcoming play, he thought, "These are the worldly leaders. These are the unexpected but faithful allies splendidly won by the Church."

He blew out little clouds of perfumed smoke, sipped the delicious strong coffee, and seemed to be altogether at home —in just the kind of home that he was destined later on to occupy.

The brown paneling gave the room dignity, the low-beamed ceiling made it picturesque; on the long table, amidst the cut glass and piled fruit, there were great silver pots filled with pink tulips; the latticed windows stood open, and their short silk curtains flapped lazily, showing glimpses of the railed court, the roadway, and fine carriages that passed now and then. It seemed difficult to think that it was Sunday, and not easy to remember St. Bede's Institute, the railway arches, or those huddled dwellings beside the canal.

After luncheon, when the guests were beginning to disperse, he and Hayling found themselves together, and Hayling called to the Duke of Danesborough to join them.

"Danesborough," said Hayling smilingly, "do something for Churchill."

Danesborough laughed. "Only too delighted. But what can your servant possibly do, except thank Mr. Churchill for his sermon? I've done that already; but I'm sure I do it again—and very sincerely."

"Oh, rats," said Hayling. "Churchill isn't a suitor or a courtier—very much the reverse; and he'll probably slang me for my interference afterwards;—but we don't want him to hide his light under a bushel much longer." And he went on with emphasis. "It is a light that ought to shine in its *proper place.*"

"I've no doubt it ought," said the Duke, looking rather puzzled.

"We think"—and Hayling put his hand on Churchill's shoulder—"we think he has taken a wrong turning—or that he is going down a lane that has no turning—and we want you to open out a real road for him."

All this made Churchill uncomfortable, and he tried to get away.

"Good-bye," said Danesborough. "Are you ever available at the dinner hour? Could you dine with me at my club one night this week? You too, Hayling?"

But Edward Churchill could not dine with the Duke. He was never free between eight and ten o'clock at night.

In the hall, where the departing ladies still made chatter and fun, Father Bryan shook hands with him hurriedly, and then called after him.

"Churchill! It was three-seventeen, two and nine. They will send you the cheque to-morrow. *Au plaisir de vous revoir.*"

"Where do you say you'll get your omnibus?" asked Hayling. "Oxford Street? All right. I'll walk with you;" and they strolled away together, through a wide square, by huge porches of opulent houses where footmen yawned vacuously at the sunlight and the sky.

"I'm glad," said Hayling, "that you've met Danesborough. He's an old friend of mine. And, I say, it's a pity you didn't agree to take just *one* night off when he asked you. If he should make any further overtures, I hope you won't snub him. Although so young, he is at this moment perhaps the most important man in England."

"Really?"

"Yes. He is not yet fully aware of it himself. It is the force of circumstances."

"But how do you mean?"

Hayling explained that the Duke of Danesborough, by reason of his position as a layman, had become the ambassador or intermediary between the head of the Church and the advanced party. "At this moment," he said, "we are approaching a crisis. There is either going to be an accommodation or a most tremendous split. I need not tell you that we stand firm as the rock. We do not sue hat in hand for tolerance; we claim liberty as our right. To-day the Church of the Crucifixion appears startingly conspicuous. It is talked about, written about—people express wonder that the Archbishop permits it. But all that we saw there this morning will in twenty years be the practice of every parish church. The Archbishop understands this as clearly as you or I. He is for the time impotent—unable to support us, unable to resist us. It is a gross injustice to say he trims his sails to the wind. As a wise ruler he does what is possible, and does not attempt the impossible. In spirit he is always with us, if in act he sometimes seems against us."

Hayling further enlarged upon the sort of confidential negotiations that were being carried on through the Duke and again dwelt upon the point that only a laymen could be thus employed. "No cleric could safely be received at headquarters as our representative."

XVIII

Two days later a polite little note arrived from the Duke of Danesborough, saying that he had some business to do at Lambeth Palace on the following afternoon and he wished to take this opportunity of making Churchill known to the Primate.

Without hesitation Churchill availed himself of this kind offer; presenting himself at Hedwick House as he had been directed, and almost immediately driving off with Danesborough in a small brougham attached to a very big horse.

It happened that he had never till now been given an occasion for observing the gaiety and brightness that London, at this end of it, can show early on a summer afternoon when all the frivolous world has come out in search of pleasure. A block of carriages delayed them in Piccadilly. Girls dressed like fairies passed slowly by, silk hats were shining, and all the brass harness flashed as if it had been made of burnished gold. People smiled and nodded to one another, and in every face there was an expression of complacency that seemed to say, "Oh, it is nice to be rich and idle and beautifully dressed."

They went fast down St. James's Street, past the stone club-houses, by the gatehouse and cloisters of the palace, and on beneath the green trees in the park. Here each glance lighted on something charming—the smooth grass, the vivid flowers, the sparkle of the water, and through unexpected vistas a mass of buildings with the towers of Westminster high and grand beyond.

Danesborough talked in the easy jovial style of one undergraduate speaking to another.

"Rather a redoubtable old party, you know. Not too easy to get on with, they say, as a rule, but he's always very decent to me."

And he said a few words about Oxford.

"When did you come down? . . . Ah, then I was your senior by a lot. . . . There was a rascal of a nigger who played the banjo. A most impudent blackguard;" and he chuckled, as if amused by his recollections. "Not a sooty-face—a real negro. I can't remember what they called him."

"Bandy Jack?"

"Yes. Bandy Jack;" and Danesborough chuckled heartily. "Oh, that fellow's impudence! I always used to have him at my rooms for breakfasts and luncheons."

Edward Churchill answered other questions automatically, thinking the while how wonderful it all was. He was being taken to see the English pontiff, the august successor to those saints, Augustine and Dunstan, the last representative of the long glorious line of priests that had held the supreme office. A hundred memories of the old school days came to him. He thought of the Martyr's Feast, of the Annual Letter; and also of an imagination or vision of the Archbishop standing on the steps outside the great western door of the cathedral, holding out his hands, and blessing the Pilgrim's road.

After they had crossed the river, and when they drew near to the dark time-stained walls, he could not speak. He could only move his head, trying to catch first glimpses of the Lollards' Tower.

Churchill had been left in an ante-room while the Duke transacted his business, whatever it might be, and when at last he was summoned he felt his heart begin to beat tumultuously. Reverence and awe had suddenly been stirred by excitement. A chaplain and a secretary coming out passed him as he went in.

He had a rapid impression of a large and unexpectedly cold room, some logs of wood smouldering on the hearth, and the sunlight seeming veiled and unnatural as one saw vaguely through closed windows a stretch of lawn, blackened buildings, and the river. Danesborough stood by one of several writing-tables; and the Archbishop, with his hands clasped behind his back, ambled about between another table and the fire. He was old and big; his bushy eyebrows had a portentous frown; there were deep wrinkles on each side of his lips. His voice sounded harsh and grating, and there were curious modulations in it that appeared to be beyond his control, so that from a growl it rose almost to a squeak and then abruptly deepened again; but his smile was kind and gentle. Seen thus, without the robes, and close to one, he seemed absolutely different from the man Churchill had watched from a distance at St. Dunstan's.

Smiling, he said that he was pleased to make Mr. Churchill's acquaintance. Then he growled.

"Tell me a little about yourself."

And Edward Churchill said that he was a St. Martyr's boy.

"What, are you one of my well-beloved?" and the Archbishop laughed gratingly. "No wonder people speak highly of you. My Martyrites always do me credit. . . . Well, what next?"

Churchill was at a loss what to say. But then, very modestly, he narrated how while at Oxford he had enjoyed the honour of receiving a letter from his Grace.

"Did you? What about?"

"A little paper that I wrote in a review."

And finally the Archbishop remembered. "Yes, I remember perfectly;" and he turned to Danesborough. "Your friend can use his pen as well as his tongue."

Danesborough chuckled amiably, pleased that his protégé was coming out in so favourable a light.

"Yes," said the Archbishop, frowning, "I distinctly remember. I was struck by it. People talked about it. It was excellent."

And, listening to these words of praise, Edward Churchill had a curious sensation of pride and pleasure that was touched with sadness. Through the furthest window he could see at a distance the river flowing by; without seeing them, he was aware of the towers, the gates, and courts, and steps, the majesty of this ancient palace stretching its stone lengths far and near; and he thought, "How wonderful all this is—that my dream is realising itself; that, as if by some force over which I have no control, without making the slightest effort, drifted like a cork upon that stream, or moved like a pawn upon the vast chess-board of Church politics, I find myself here. Then this must be the great hour of my life, the moment of crisis, the turning-point that decides whither I go, what I become." Instinct, as well as thought, told him that this was so, and that all he had hoped for would now easily come to him. And yet he felt no elation, only increasing dullness or coldness.

The Archbishop went on speaking. "So I wrote to you? What did I say?"

"You were good enough to say that I might come and pay my respects to you."

"And did you come?"

"No, your Grace."

"Why didn't you?" And the Archbishop frowned.

"I didn't venture."

"Didn't venture—when I told you? Didn't venture to obey orders?" Then he turned to the Duke, and smiled. "There. Rebellious, to a man! So young, but so full of defiance. Can you be astonished at what they say in the penny newspapers? Open revolt. . . . That was how long ago, when I wrote to you, Mr. Churchill?"

"Four years, your Grace."

"Now that you have come, what do you want of me?"

Edward Churchill felt a sudden assurance, a certainty of voice and action that rendered hesitation impossible.

"I want your blessing;" and he dropped upon his knees.

There was surprise as well as searching scrutiny in the glance that shot down at him from puckered brows. Then the old man smiled as kind people smile at little children, half closed his eyes, and, looking upward again, very solemnly blessed his young visitor.

Five minutes later, Churchill was driving away in Danesborough's brougham.

"That's all right," said the Duke cheerily. "He was quite decent, wasn't he? I always find him jolly enough—and I don't know why people are so down on him. Anyhow, he isn't a humbug."

Then, when Churchill thanked him for his kindness in procuring the great privilege of this interview, he altogether refused to accept thanks. "Oh, no, not a bit. Only too pleased—directly it was suggested to me. I'm sure I hope something may come of it."

He was to drive Churchill as far as Westminster, having himself to look in at the Lords for half an hour; but now he offered to send his companion up to the Strangers' Gallery.

"The debate won't be worth listening to," he said. "But it may amuse you to have a peep at us—and, of course, you can go out directly you are bored."

Soon then Churchill was seated in the gallery, leaning his chin on his arms, and with intense interest staring down into the famous assembly-hall. As just now at Lambeth, so here, thronging memories of history, tradition, and sentiment rushed into his mind. He had imagined it all so often, but now for the first time he was really seeing the red benches and gilded walls, the high painted windows, the open doors of the Princes' Chamber, the woolsack, and the throne. Listening to the languid voices of great peers, watching a couple of bishops in lawn sleeves, studying the quiet pomp and sober magnificence of ushers and officials, he felt a satisfied approbation. Everything was as impressive as he had ever pictured it in his imagination.

These were the time-honoured ruling classes. One could catch the same note in every voice. They were so accustomed to power that they exercised it as naturally as if it had been an organic process, such as drawing one's breath; yet loving power, however languid they appeared; pleased with themselves in an easy, dignified manner; seeming to say: "Yes, it is nice, as well as fitting and proper, that I was born to high rank and large revenues, so that I do this sort of thing between luncheon and dinner instead of perspiring in manual toil on a half-penny stomach."

When he came out he stood on Westminster Bridge, looking at the graceful sunlit bulk of the Houses of Parliament and the dark grim towers of Lambeth Palace. Then he walked eastward along the Embankment, past the new castle of Scotland Yard, huge hotels that looked like fortresses, a pile of flats as big as a granite mountain; past Somerset House, the resting place of rich men's testaments, and the Temple, home of the clever and well-paid lawyers who upset one's death-bed wishes; past offices, institutions, more hotels;—and he was still among the ruling classes. Money-making City-men came sweeping by in cabs and carriages after their short successful day. No poverty was anywhere visible. All seemed grand, fine, prosperous. And he had an illusion that these contented, self-satisfied people all looked at him with friendly approval, greeting him, welcoming him, conveying to him a universal message of good-will, as if they had said: "Your probation is over. Now you may join us. We admit you to our select community, and you too shall rule and amass and grow fat."

At Blackfriars he got into an underground train, and went back through the darkness and foul atmosphere of many tunnels to what are generally known as "the slums."

XIX

He had not long to wait before something came of that afternoon spent with a duke in the West End.

Before the week was over he received a communication from the Archbishop. It was formal, official, written by a secretary, and it informed him that his Grace proposed to appoint him to be one of his chaplains, that he might consider this appointment as made pro tem. until the chance of preferment should offer, when he would be passed on to more important work. It further requested Mr. Churchill to reply at once, and, in the event of the proposal being agreeable to him, to say the earliest date whereon he could conveniently take up his residence at Lambeth Palace.

Churchill sat as if spell-bound, folding and unfolding the stiff white sheet of paper, reading and re-reading the marvellous written words, seeming every instant to grow larger and heavier. There was a massive feeling of satisfaction, a notion of unquestionable power, a complete and absolute confidence; but then soon, marring these pleasurable sensations, there came a strange sort of fluttered excitement. He could no longer sit still. It was necessary to move about rapidly and continuously.

He hurried off to tell Walsden his news. Walsden heartily congratulated him.

"To us it is a loss—I make no pretence about that. But it is a loss I was always prepared for. I can see how glad you are—my dear boy;" and he took Churchill's hand and squeezed it affectionately.

"I am only glad because it realises my ambition; it is a step forward on the path I had been vain enough to plan."

"No vanity—very proper and noble ambition," said Walsden.

And a little later in the day, meeting Churchill again, he said, "Of course you have written?"

"No, not yet. I want to think it over."

"What can you have to think over?"

"I'm so sorry to leave you."

"Oh, you mustn't bother about *that*. We who are left may be sorry, but you who go must be glad. I should write at once, if I were you. Any delay might seem not quite respectful enough, you know."

"As to-day is Saturday, I thought I could safely wait till Monday. There's no postal delivery to-morrow."

"Perhaps you ought to send your letter by a special messenger. As you know, I am not up in these matters; but I believe one cannot be too ceremonious."

For the remainder of the day Edward Churchill suffered from an abominable restlessness. It was impossible to work, because he couldn't attend for three minutes at a time to what he was trying to do; his mind wandered off to more important matters; in imagination he was miles away—pacing through the halls or library of Lambeth Palace, sitting in the Archbishop's room and writing a confidential secret paper at his dictation, hurrying to the House of Lords for a special interview with two or three bishops. He wanted to write to his mother, but found that he could not do it. He thought he would go to St. Ursula's for a talk with the Verschoyles, and he could not do that either. He could only wander about the streets aimlessly, enervating himself with foolish excitement.

In the evening at the club he discovered that Walsden had already announced his imminent departure. Everybody had heard the news, and all regretted it. Old and young, they crowded round him, overwhelming him by their kindness and affection. He was especially touched by the eager outbursts of praise and gratitude that came from a cluster of Brigade lads; and when he looked at the opaque brown eyes, like Richard's—the eyes that he once thought indicative of baseness or greed—they seemed to be like the eyes of trustful dogs sadly scrutinising the face of their master when he meditates selling them, giving them away, or deserting them in danger for the purpose of ensuring his own safety.

The restlessness increased. He could not sleep. He dressed himself next morning much earlier than was necessary for the first service at St. Bede's, and, going up to the top landing of Bentley House, stood for a long time looking out. On this the day of rest the whole house remained quiet until eight or nine o'clock; behind all the closed doors men and women were sleeping deeply after the week's work; only every now and then one heard faintly the voices of children who had been awakened by the daylight. On this day, too, hundreds of factory chimneys had ceased to emit their ugly smoke, so that the air was clean, and the sky seemed high and dazzlingly bright.

He looked across thousands of roofs at the firm outline of the Tower Bridge, and thought of all that lay beyond it. The line of the bridge, continued in either direction to north and south, might be taken as a boundary between two worlds —the grand small world of pride and pomp, and the immense world of unrecognised pain and unrewarded toil. Patches of misery there were, of course, beyond the line to the south of the water, but the great division between ease and distress was that of east and west. In thought he passed the line; followed the shining river beneath bridge after bridge, by the now silent mart of the city, by the Temple and the Houses of Parliament, to the black-walled palace of ecclesiastical government—to the splendid, glorious home in which a room stood waiting for him.

After an hour or so, when he was going out, he found a little friend crying on the doorsteps and he stopped to comfort her. She had slipped on the pavement and grazed her knees. Her mother, the wife of a dock porter, who presently appeared and saw him kiss and soothe the child, praised him and thanked him for his kindness.

"You make 'em so many favourites, sir. . . . Nellie, where's your present what you was going to give Mr. Churchill?" And the woman laughed, telling Churchill how the little girl had picked up an empty match-box two or three days ago, and had declared that she would present it to the kind gentleman upstairs. "And so she would have done it, sir, but her brother Tom went and took it from her and lost it."

There was no mental calm for him throughout that Sunday. He could not think any more quietly inside the church than outside it. The services seemed innumerable and interminable.

When the last of them was over he took a long walk, and all the time he thought of the misery here and the comfort at the other end of the town. He thought of the palace that was waiting for him—its grand library where all such sad facts as he now looked at are neatly pigeon-holed, set forth in statistical papers, shown in shaded maps, or lengthily recited in blue books. For him, too, after a few years, they would be merely written or printed notes: the life and reality would begin to go out of them so soon as he occupied his mind with other and fairer things.

Working his way home again, he purposely came over the canal bridge, so as to enter the parish on its very worst side. The last glow of the sunset was fading out of the sky, and all those bad streets were already dark and mysterious—a place to make strangers tremble. But to him they were not even ugly to-night. Familiarity, here as in the church, had obliterated the ugliness. There was not a court or alley that he had not visited many times; blindfolded, he could have found his way through the labyrinth; on all sides he had succeeded in making acquaintances who welcomed him as he passed by. They called to him now from the dark entries. "Good-night, sir. . . . Nice day it's bin, sir. . . .Good-night."

As he drew nearer home, he met people that he knew really well, and walked with them. He said to each, "I'm afraid I am going away."

"Yes, I hear talk of it. But you'll be coming back, sir."

"No, I—I fear not."

And they were all sorry.

He stood at a corner talking for five minutes to Mr. Philbrick, the old fellow who had preferred death to the workhouse. Churchill and Mr. Philbrick had grown to be very close friends.

"Well," said Mr. Philbrick, "what's got to be has got to be. But when a party first mentioned it to me, I said, 'Don't you go telling lies about Mr. Churchill.' That was because I didn't believe it, d'ye see, sir; but now you've had the kindness to explain it me, well, I say 'Quite right';" and he pointed his pipe and nodded. "Yes, you have to think of yourself, same as everybody else—and where's the use of arguing? It was just foolish to suppose you'd stop here for ever. And I say, good luck, sir—and may you always have your heart's desire."

After that Edward Churchill walked on alone with his thoughts; and suddenly, just as he turned the last corner and saw the lamplit windows of the vicarage, he said to himself: "I cannot do it. These people are fond of me; they seem to believe I help them—and I cannot leave them. It would be like a betrayal. I will not do it."

Instantaneously all the conflict of thought was at an end. The letter to the Archbishop that had seemed so difficult to write could be written quite easily. He would not address the secretary; he would write direct to his Grace, marking the letter private, and sealing it; and its grateful words need only be to this effect: "You gave me all when you gave me your blessing. I asked for nothing else; I want nothing else."

Entering the dining-room at the vicarage, he apologised for his lateness and found that the meal was just over. Nevertheless, they stayed with him a little while to keep him company. He would at once have told them of his decision, but Walsden was too preoccupied to listen attentively to anything, and Mrs. Walsden wished to tell him how in the most inexplicable manner she had allowed some oil to get upon her fingers and thence into her mouth. It had made her feel quite sick. Mr. Nape, corroborating with a titter, said that for a minute she had looked as though she really was going to be sick. Gardiner, however, had cleverly suggested that she should drink a little vinegar, and she soon felt better. Still the whole incident had been very upsetting —and so inexplicable.

And Churchill, listening to this commonplace conversation and smiling at their simple friendly faces, felt altogether happy. That restlessness was utterly gone. Everything seemed bright and cheerful. He looked round the poor room, at the distempered walls, and the bad engravings in meretricious frames, the crinkly paper and wax flowers on the chiffonier; and he thought of a room like Father Bryan's, with panelling, with cut glass, with tulips in silver pots, such a room as he had hoped to have for his own. Thinking of it he could see it, vivid and solid, absolutely real. But it was here that he wanted to be, not there.

He ate a little bread and cheese, drank some water, and then, when the others had left him, he lit his pipe and smoked. Every minute he became more comfortable, more delightfully at peace, more sure that his decision was right and proper. One must do the thing nearest to one's hand. He was useful here, and he had no certainty that he could ever be so useful elsewhere. The Archbishop could find a hundred men to take his place and occupy it admirably, but perhaps St. Bede's might never find a man capable of filling the little gap that he would leave behind him if he went now. Later on, it might be all different. In a few years he might be able to go with an easy conscience. And it might be not too late, even then, to pick up the broken progress of his career.

But if staying now meant the final abandonment of all his ambitious dreams—well, nevertheless, he must stay. He said to himself, "If need be, good-bye Ambition;" and again he felt stronger and calmer. He thought of his philosophy, those broad principles that, for him, seemed firmly established. After all, the real ambition should be to still one's restlessness of thought; internal peace must be the aim of all who are wise; there cannot be any other goal that is worth reaching. To gain mental quiet—that, philosophically, is a man's lifework.

And he thought of the lamp that was his soul and the mirror that was his mind, and knew with absolute certainty of instinct that what he meant to do should make him peacefully happy, and that what he was giving up would but have made him fretfully miserable. "I knew it all the time," he thought. "I only seemed to deliberate; I was not truly deliberating. Whenever I turned my eyes inward, I could see my guard. Now and always, O God give me strength to live by the Mirror and the Lamp."

XX

WALSDEN answered almost rudely when Edward Churchill told him that he had refused the appointment.

"*Refused* it? Why in the name of reason have you done that?"

"I preferred to stay here. On reflection I felt that I could not bring myself to leave you."

"Oh, now—that sounds to me far-fetched," said Walsden, staring, and speaking abruptly. "Almost absurd. Yes, I thing you're wrong. I advise you to change your mind."

"My mind is quite made up."

Walsden brought out his bandana handkerchief, blew his nose violently, and moved away.

"I think," he said over his shoulder, "it's a pity. But there—I can't stop talking about it;" and with a queer flourish of the handkerchief, as though it had been a signal flag he hurried off.

Next day little Mrs. Walsden got hold of Churchill alone for a minute, and said that she desired to apologise for unkind thoughts that she had for a little while entertained, and to explain that any oddness in her husband's manner was certainly not caused by displeasure.

"Mr. Churchill, I want to thank you for staying—and I want you to forgive me for once wishing you would go. I misjudged you. I thought you were too grand—inclined to take too much on yourself. Please forgive me. I did doubt your loyalty to Henry—but now, oh, now, I am so ashamed of myself."

Then, after clasping Churchill's hand, she began to cry. "You don't know what this means to my husband. He never complains, but he has always *felt* it—the way he is treated by the upper clergy. As if he wasn't good enough for them! But he's good enough for *you*. When it came to choosing them or him, you chose *him*. Mr. Churchill, he wept last night—a thing I've never seen him do since our children died."

Edward Churchill had written to his mother, and he anxiously awaited her reply. He had said: "A great chance came, and I refused it. I don't know what you will think of me for not consulting you; but it was something I had to decide for myself." Then, giving a simple explanation of the ideas that governed him, he begged her to let him know without delay that she approved.

Mrs. Churchill allowed some little time to elapse before writing, and when her letter arrived it did not altogether satisfy him. It was not quite the letter that he had expected.

She confessed that she could not understand all his motives; but she allowed him what she thought ought to be allowed to everybody—entire liberty of action. "I do not therefore question your decision. Life is difficult for all of us, and each must meet its difficulties in his own way." Then she spoke of her loneliness, the loss of old friends, the changes that were taking place at St. Dunstan's; and she wound up with a gloomy little sketch of the present circumstances of that Mr. Barrett, the auctioneer. As Edward knew, since she had already told him so several times, Mr. Barrett, after losing his sick wife about a year ago, was left absolutely alone in the world. His devotion to the poor invalid had been unparalleled; for an immense time she had ceased to be in any sense a companion to him; and now that death had come to her as a happy release, one might have hoped that he could enjoy comfort and peace. But no, fate had ordained otherwise. His business had almost collapsed, some building speculations had gone wrong, and he saw himself compelled to sell his commodious though not very pretty house, together with the solid but rather ugly furniture. He was living in lodgings all alone. This and many other things made Mrs. Churchill very sad when she thought of them.

With Walsden's ready consent, Edward went down to St. Dunstan's and spent one night there. His mother seemed delighted to see him, but she showed nervousness, or agitation; she was somehow different in voice, manner, appearance. For the first time he found an impalpable barrier between them, and all his efforts could not break through it sufficiently to re-establish the old free intercourse of heart with heart.

He thought that she secretly disapproved of his remaining at St. Bede's, but when he spoke of this she said that it did not matter.

"But, mother dearest, you feel perhaps that it was not quite fair to you?"

"Oh, no, dear. You had to judge for yourself—we all must do that: judge by our own conscience what is right or wrong. No, it could not matter to me."

"But our dreams, mother. All the success and the honour."

"Yes, of course—I was forgetting our dreams. But for *you*—your part of them may still come true, mayn't it?"

"Yes," he said; "at any rate, the part I care most about. Only, unhappily, I seem to be postponing that also."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean our living together—under one roof again."

"Edward! My own dear boy." She flung her arms around him, kissed him, and sobbed hysterically.

"Edward dear," she went on presently, when she had dried her eyes. "Isn't that just the part of the dream that was most fatally impossible from the very beginning?"

"No—a thousand times no."

"Yes, dear. Perhaps I wasn't prepared—I didn't quite guess—how lofty your ideals of priesthood were going to be, how completely you would give yourself to the Church. Don't you feel it yourself—that there is no room in your life for other interests—certainly no room in it for a silly old mother."

But he protested passionately that his love for her was, as ever, the very main-spring of his existence. It did not clash, it never could clash, with that other love. It would not interfere with, it would aid him, strengthen him, ennoble him in his priestly duties. And eagerly he begged her to make the great sacrifice and come now and join him in the good work.

It was, of course, impossible that she should live in St. Bede's itself; but he would find some comparatively pleasant house at Canning Town, or somewhere, from which he could go to his work every morning and to which he would return every night. Home! The place made lovely by love. And she herself should work in St. Bede's; all those poor souls would adore her; and they two, united, would be infinitely happy.

"Mother dear, it is only what we planned first of all—before the money came to give me vainglorious dreams. Don't you remember? We were to end our days in some obscure neighborhood among the very poor."

She listened to him silently, her hands clasped on her lap, her eyes downcast. Then of a sudden she got up, walked about the room, and spoke without looking at him.

"Edward, I don't know. I want to do what is right—but it is all so difficult. If you really want to make yourself a home, why, why don't you marry, and——"

"Mother!"

"You—you've not taken any vows against marriage?"

"No. Not yet; but I think what I always thought. A priest should remain unmarried. It is *you* I am longing for. Mother, come to me."

Then she put her hands on his shoulder, stooped to kiss his forehead, and spoke with extraordinary eagerness. "Yes, I'll come. I'll be true to the old promise. Arrange it at once. The sooner I get away from here the better;" and again she began to cry, telling him once more how lonely and empty her life had been in these last years. Yet when he reproached himself for neglecting her, she protested that it was all her fault, not his. "I'm weak, dear—foolish. But if you take me away, I shall be wise and good. Oh, how could I count anything against my boy's faithful love?"

She was more like her old dear self now; and yet the barrier was still there—something inexplicable that made her different. He noticed that she seemed to have difficulty in concentrating her mind; after the tears, she laughed, and in the midst of laughter she became grave and sad; while talking, she went with unexpected rapidity from subject to subject, and just when they were considering their most intimate affairs she would obtrude some alien trivial topic.

Thus she passed instantaneously from her own loneliness to the loneliness of Mr. Barrett, the auctioneer, and Edward had to listen to a recital of the virtues and amiabilities of this vulgar, Low Church person—the common intrusive friend that he had so much disliked in his youth.

From Mr. Barrett she passed to their old servant Maria, now a pensioner, living comfortably at Hythe; and then next moment she was back to Mr. Barrett again.

"Before Maria left me, she had learnt to recognise what a good kind friend he was, and how disinterested he had always been in his advice."

Then she spoke of her other sons. Tom was on his way home to England. The health of Charles had broken down; he was in the south of France, and thought of going to California. He had got rid of that dreadful woman; but, as his mother feared, he was entangled with some one else almost as bad. She feared, too, that he had squandered nearly all his money.

"Don't you correspond with him or Tom?" she asked.

"No," said Edward. "I ought to; but they never write to me. Still I ought to have kept in touch with them somehow. It is want of time—and, to say the truth, want of thought also. Mother—one must confess the truth—they seem so completely strangers that, except here, where everything reminds me, I scarcely ever remember their existence."

"I understand, dear. It could not be otherwise. You and they are of different clay." And once more, for the third time in half an hour, she returned to the subject of Mr. Barrett. "They were always so contemptuous about him—poor man, and unjust too. Charles never showed the slightest gratitude for all he did about that electric firm. . . . Edward, will you go and see him to-morrow? Just look in on your way to the station, and say a kind word or two for auld lang syne. I told him that you were coming down—and he would be so glad to see you."

Of all people in St. Dunstan's, certainly Mr. Barrett was the last that Edward would have thought of looking up. If not pressed for time, he would have liked to go round the school, find if any of the old masters were still there, go into the gymnasium and talk to the illustrious sergeant; with further leisure he could have passed happy hours in the cathedral, strolled upon the walls and taken long walks into the country; but, even with a week or more at his disposal, he would not of his own accord have wasted five minutes on Mr. Barrett. Nevertheless, he dutifully promised to do what his mother wished. This poor widower and his distressed condition appeared to occupy a large place in her always tender thought for other people.

The auctioneer's offices in Halberd Street had a woebegone deserted air, as if the whole business world were turning its broad back on them; but Mr. Barrett did not seem to be at all cast down. Although dressed in solemn black, he had a flower at his button-hole; his tie-pin displayed a good-sized pearl; his sandy hair was carefully brushed and plastered with an odorous cosmetic above his bald forehead. Altogether he looked prosperous, debonair, generally smarter, younger and less flabby than he used to be years ago. In other respects he was just the same Mr. Barrett.

He welcomed his visitor effusively.

"Come, now, this is very kind of you, Mr. Ted. Forgive the liberty. But it's still Ted with your dear ma, and that's how I always think of you." Then he shook hands again. "Yes, I do take it as very kind—under the circumstances—you dropping in like this, and showing me such a proof of regard." And he nodded his head and smiled at Edward sentimentally. "Coming at this conjuncture it is—well, it really is more than kind."

Edward Churchill sat talking for a little while, trying to be sympathetic, but only achieving bare civility, and every minute feeling his old childish dislike revive itself more completely.

He was made inwardly to boil by a few words about religion, and a tactless reference to modern ritualism.

"You know my ways, Mr. Ted. I don't like it and I never have. I joined in the public protest to the Dean when they began screwing the cathedral services up to concert pitch. Not that I trouble the cathedral. No, Holy Trinity is good enough for me. That is where I always worshipped Him who——"

"Yes, I remember," said Edward, endeavouring to cut him short.

"I find at Holy Trinity what suits *me*. If other people don't care for our ways they are free to stay away."

"Yes, exactly."

"But stop a bit. I must take care what I'm saying, or I shall tread on your corns, Mr. Ted. Yes;" and, nodding his head and smiling, he went on in a tone of tolerance, or even magnanimity: "Yes, a little bird has whispered to me that you are right up there," and he made a gesture with his fat hand. "*High* is not the word—or so it has been hinted. Well, if those are your conscientious views, it is not for me to blame you. I follow your dear mamma's suit. I say Liberty of Conscience for all of us. That's a favourite expression of Mrs. C.'s. In our little chats it always crops up."

"My mother and I think alike, Mr. Barrett." Edward had not intended to say this. It was not worth while; but the words said themselves automatically.

"Well, in *most* things, I do believe you're right there, Mr. Ted. Yes, you were always the apple. I used to venture to name you so. It was, 'Well, my dear Mrs. Churchill, how is the Apple?' And we used to laugh. Yes—the Apple. Ha-ha! How it all takes one back. You know the expression? I meant you were the apple of her eye—and so you were."

Edward got up from his chair, and apologised for looking at his watch. He must catch the 10:40 train.

"Then I won't detain you. But a little secret;" and Mr. Barrett beamed expansively. "You were not only Mamma's favourite, you were everybody else's too. I've said it myself hundreds of times. Of you three boys, you were the one for *my* money—the flower of the flock."

In the act of going, Edward forced himself to speak with actual and unaffected sympathy of Barrett's long period of anxious solicitude and his recent crushing sorrow.

"I couldn't have gone through it," said Mr. Barrett fervently, "if it hadn't been for Mrs. C. Oh, what a saint she was, year in, year out, to pore Mrs. Barrett. As to myself, in that endless trial—well, *you* probably know, and could put it many times better than I can myself—she was my unfailing support. More than mere comfort—sunshine, hope, everything."

Edward unconsciously and instinctively drew himself up, and turned a grave, cold face to Mr. Barrett. This outburst of praise was extravagant, unnecessary, and vaguely but strongly distasteful; and an association of ideas evoked dim pictures from the past. He and his brothers did not mind

Mr. Barrett standing hat in hand on the pavement and treating Mrs. Churchill as a queen; but they never liked it when he came of an evening to talk of stocks or shares, and assume an air of equality and intimacy that neither existed nor could be suffered to exist.

"My mother's heart is always open to those in trouble, Mr. Barrett. She and I well knew your devotion to your wife, and we both regret your loss."

Then, on the outer doorstep, Edward mentioned that his mother would very soon be leaving St. Dunstan's, and they would be glad if Mr. Barrett would attend to any business matter relating to their empty house.

"What's that?" said Mr. Barrett blankly. "Leaving? When? Where for?"

"My mother is coming to live with me in London."

"With you—in London?" echoed Mr. Barrett slowly, and almost incredulously. "Well, this is news—with a vengeance. All very sudden—this idea—isn't it?"

"It is an old plan; but we finally settled it only yesterday. Good-bye, Mr. Barrett."

XXI

"WHY go outside the parish?" said Walsden, when Edward Churchill was speaking of the home he wanted to make for his mother. "Why don't you take your favourite Denmark House? It seems just a lucky chance that it should have come into the market."

Churchill could scarcely believe his ears. The thing sounded too good to be true.

"Yes," said Walsden, "Mr. Oliver—you know, the manager at Brown's—told me all about it yesterday. He owns the freehold. Poor fellow, he put all his savings into it, and now that Brown's have come to grief——"

"Brown's—the soap factory? Are they in trouble?"

"They're shut up. Didn't you hear? Half the girls weren't paid last Saturday. And Monday morning the gates never opened. A lot of the girls came round here. Then they—and some men—went back and broke as much glass as they could. Poor souls—that didn't get them their money. But I believe Mr. Oliver has paid them out of his own pocket. He is a good man—I have always said it—although a Wesleyan. I should see him at once, if I were you—because a house like that won't go a-begging. It may be snapped up any minute."

Edward hurried along Bevis Street and round the corner past the silent factory, feeling dread lest already he might be too late. But to-day all things seemed to smile at him. Denmark House had not yet been snapped up; and in a few minutes he was walking about it, being escorted as a possible purchaser by the owner and the owner's wife.

It surpassed one's most excited anticipations, it was a rare gem, a perfect oasis in the desert. The staircase had shallow steps and a broad hand-rail; the hall was paved with black and white stone; and nearly all the rooms had panelled walls. Those on the first floor were quite lofty, and in the biggest room there were low window seats from which one looked straight into the heart of the plane tree.

The fireplaces were modern and detestable; evidently beautiful old chimney-pieces had been ruthlessly torn away, and the whole house showed signs of long-continued vandalism. But nothing mattered; everything could be restored; and Edward felt that if it might be his, he would be the happiest house-owner in England.

He would not bargain, indeed one could not bargain with a man who had come to trouble. Mr. Oliver did not intend to let the house on lease; he proposed to sell it at auction; but if he could dispose of his property by private treaty for a sufficient price, he would cheerfully do so. Then only the question of price remained to be settled, and Mr. Oliver promised at once to seek expert advice and report the result.

Edward went away in the highest spirits. Surely this was more than a lucky chance; it was a kindness of Providence to gladden and cheer him on his rightly-chosen path. He looked back at the house, and saw sunlight upon the iron gate and the green leaves; and in imagination saw it as his home, all gay with fresh paint, the cornice white, the well-cleaned window panes flashing like diamonds—and a loved figure at the open door, waving her hand, following him with her eyes. He kissed his fingers to that dear one.

And wherever he went, all the day, there seemed to be sunshine and people smiling at him. He thought, "This is the first of many such days. It is the turned page, the new chapter of my life—no, of *our* life, which will be so tranquil and so happy that from it there will come only one regret: that it may not go on for ever."

The entire parish was rejoicing because he was to stay and not to go. He had a triumphal progress through the streets. Men, women, and children hung about him and made much of him.

Passing through Bevis Street late in the afternoon, he had the pleasant surprise of suddenly meeting that nice young woman, Miss Vickers. Although he had only once spoken to her before this, he felt that she, too, was an old friend and he told her how glad it made him to see her again.

"I was afraid you had deserted us for good and all."

"Oh, no," she said. "But I am living over towards Barking now, so I had to drop the district nursing here. I do what I can over there, but it's very little—and I come to see Mrs. Walsden from time to time."

Then he took her round the corner to look at the outside of the house that he hoped to buy, talking to her with the expansive freedom that was bred of his happiness, taking it for granted to-day that she and everybody else must be interested in his private affairs, telling her all about his mother and the perfect life that they were to lead together.

She responded amiably and sympathetically, delighting him with her praise of Denmark House and her rapid comprehension of his filial joy. Then as they came back to the streets she said a word or two about herself, as though purposely offering confidence in exchange for confidence.

She told him that she did not like the church at Barking. She missed St. Bede's.

"But I'm busier now than I used to be, and I have very little time for church or anything else. I teach music, you know."

He did not know. Really he knew nothing about her; but instinctively he seemed to have divined so much, and the thought of her as a hard-worked music teacher exactly matched his preconceived ideas. Of course she was not a West-ender or a doctor's daughter—that had been a foolish, ill-considered notion, entertained only for a little while because she dressed with taste and spoke charmingly. She was alone in the world, self-maintaining, self-respecting; a pure good girl, who did not fear poverty and was not too proud to work.

They said good-bye at the corner of Bevis Street, and, looking at him shyly, she said, "Mr. Churchill, I have heard you preach. I heard you at Plaistow, and at Walthamstow." Then she flushed faintly, stopped speaking, and held out her hand. But he understood quite well that she had intended to tell him that she liked his sermons, and then at the last moment had diffidently refrained.

"No, not good-bye," he said cordially. "As soon as my mother arrives, I hope you will find time to come and see us."

"I should like to very much."

He watched her as she walked away, seeming so graceful and fragile for the rough, coarse battle of life, and yet so brave in her self-reliant loneliness; and the thought came to his mind that, although not in the least like Mrs. Verschoyle, she resembled her in being the rare type of woman who might make a possible wife for a priest.

This little meeting seemed to crown his happy, lucky day. He felt extraordinarily glad that she had not altogether disappeared from St. Bede's; and in a pretty, fantastic manner she again linked herself with the tree at Denmark House—the thing that had soothed his eyes when first he saw it amidst the arid desert of ugliness.

Three days later he was able to telegraph to his mother that the tree belonged to him.

He had acquired the freehold of Denmark House at a price that certainly did not wrong Mr. Oliver. Naturally this implied an inroad on his capital—the first that he had so far made; but one might consider it as a reinvestment, by no means an injudicious transaction up to a certain point. Beyond that point, one might call it a grant in aid to a worthy and unfortunate Wesleyan gentleman who was more in need of hard cash than Edward Churchill.

He would not discuss pounds, shillings, and pence when his solicitors demurred to what they termed an exorbitant figure. It was truly of no consequence. He and his mother, joining their resources, would be the Rothschilds of St. Bede's—flagrantly too rich.

She, of course, would bring her furniture with her; any more furnishing would be a slight affair; the only solid expense would be thorough repairing and re-decoration. And in this and every other regard, Mrs. Churchill gave him a free hand. Whatever pleased him would please her. She had no suggestions to offer; she was barren of decorative ideas; indeed, the only thing that a little checked his rapture was the want of enthusiasm that her letters betrayed. She wrote meekly and staidly, saying that henceforth her life was to be guided by her dear boy and that she would be tranquilly acquiescent. She did not want to come to see the house for herself; she had so much to do at St. Dunstan's; if he absolutely required feminine advice, he could not do better than consult that very kind and considerate Mrs. Verschoyle. She begged him to convey her sincere thanks for Mrs. Verschoyle's most hospitable invitations.

"Well, Christian," Mrs. Verschoyle had said, when he burst in upon her with his latest news, "how are you and Vanity Fair getting on together?"

"I have done with Vanity Fair," he cried joyously. "I have struck deep roots in what used to be the Slough of Despond—and the marsh is drained, and flowers are growing up, and it is all changing to a fairy garden."

"And what does that nonsense mean in plain English?" she asked, laughing.

"It means that I am a permanent citizen of St. Bede's. It means that I own a house almost as delightful as this—the one I told you about—my lovely Denmark House. Oh, do put on your hat and come and let me show it to you."

She went with him at once, answering gaily and hopefully to all he said about the home life that he would henceforth enjoy; but she was very grave and thoughtful when he told her of Lambeth and the rejected offer.

"Don't try to pretend that I have done wrong," he urged her. "I know I was right. I couldn't be so happy—if not."

Time passed now in a whirl of pleasant business. Every minute that he could take from his parish duties he gave to the house and to the workmen who were hard at work in it. Mrs. Verschoyle aided him and advised him throughout his preparations for the mother who could not come even for a day to choose curtains and carpets, or to decide upon the situation of electric light brackets.

The allotment of the rooms was an easy task. On the ground floor so much space was taken by the hall that there were only two sitting-rooms, and these would be their dining-room and Edward's study. The first floor would be entirely devoted to Mrs. Churchill—her bedroom at the front, with a boudoir at the side of it, and behind these the big room that occupied the full width of the house would serve as her drawing-room. Here she would sit enthroned, surrounded by all her old treasures, and doubtless with many pretty things that he would add to them, interesting herself in charitable schemes, reading, writing letters, receiving visitors, being steadily, calmly happy. On the top floor there were five small rooms, of which one would be her son's bedroom. Two of the others would be absorbed by the nice maidservants that Mrs. Churchill was to bring with her. And the other two would stand waiting for his brothers, whenever their mother wished to have them as visitors under her roof. Beyond all this there was a bath-room, now being fitted with the newest and most fashionable bath in lieu of the dilapidated tank left by the outgoing proprietor.

Edward, going from room to room with Mrs. Verschoyle, used to babble unceasingly about the beloved mistress of his house.

"She will be as fond of that tree as I am. Doesn't it look sweet from this window? Oh, I wish she could see it before all the leaves are off. . . . You know, after her solitary life during the last few years, I think she would be content *anywhere* with me. But really, this house itself is a grand exchange from our old home. It is only the neighbourhood that may strike her as dull and depressing—just as it did me, at first. But then I don't mean to keep her a prisoner here. I shall arrange things. Yes, I shall insist on her going often to theatres and concerts. I'll give her what she has never enjoyed." And he laughed gaily. "She will be rather a West-ender where pleasures are concerned."

Mrs. Verschoyle used to laugh too, amused and yet touched by all this chatter. "I have heard of devoted sons," she said to him once; "but I never heard of a son like you. Do you know that you talk exactly as a man might when he was going to be married and waiting the arrival of his bride!"

"She and I are all in all to each other," he answered simply.

Nevertheless she did not hurry to him. Slow as workmen must ever be, they had finished their work at last. By the end of November the house was ready to receive its furniture and its mistress. Braving the smell of paint, Edward had moved into it weeks ago, and was camping in the boudoir on the first floor, his unopened packing-cases all about the little iron bed, a sheet spread out on the floor to guard the freshness and bloom of the new carpet. He longed for the first instalment of the dear old furniture; he felt feverishly anxious to see and put up the bedstead he had used as a boy; he burned to get everything in its place; he pined for the lady of his house.

But she did not come. She delayed, she made excuses; she could not dispatch anything this week; she could not herself hope to get on the move until the week after. Then she sent him a brief note, begging him to come down to St. Dunstan's at once, "and discuss the future."

Discuss the future! But the future was all settled. What could there be to discuss?

XXII

He was sitting with her in the room that he used to think of as a shrine, where she had first taught him to pray; her head was on his breast so that he looked down at her grey hairs; her whole body trembled; her tears fell upon his hand and burned it. He sat for a little while rigid and still, feeling like a man who has received his death wound, and who dares not move lest the blood which is slowly and surely draining away should gush forth in a rapid stream of destruction. Then he stooped and kissed her forehead.

"Mother dear, look up. Let us talk quietly. Tell me everything, so that I may understand."

But truly it was not understandable. It was abnormal, monstrous, torturingly impossible. She had just told him that she wanted to marry Mr. Barrett the auctioneer.

Now, taking courage from his gentle tone, she began to explain the unexplainable, to defend the indefensible. From the very beginning Mr. Barrett had intensely admired her, and, as she phrased it, "in the most delicate way," had allowed her to become aware of the fact. And this admiration had expanded and ripened into a unique and beautiful sentiment on his part; it was a perpetual worship that she herself had always felt, but of course had never spoken of. It had been an atmosphere of respectful mystery with which he had surrounded her, and to which little by little she had grown accustomed, breathing it year after year with peaceful pleasure.

"Edward, my darling, don't judge me hardly. You can scarcely know what this means to a woman. Such devotion cannot be ignored. In itself it has a power to sustain and support one. It made life easier for me. It seemed to give me strength—and it never, never for a moment interfered with my duty to you."

And then she said, with great eagerness, that he must not suppose she had ever given Mr. Barrett the very slightest encouragement, or that a single affectionate word had ever passed between them during the lifetime of Mrs. Barrett. No, it was only after his poor invalid had passed away that he openly announced his love, and began to supplicate for its reward.

"But I refused him, Edward—for your sake. I felt that you would not like it, and I told him that it could not be."

Mr. Barrett, however, was not a person to take no for an answer. Now that his suit was lawful, he had proved a persistent suitor; and everything pleaded for him and appealed to her softer feelings—his loneliness, his failure in business, his patience and courage and chivalry. "It is not given to many women," she said, "to arouse such a constant, elevated passion in the heart of a really good man." So that she had been on the point of yielding when Edward came down and extracted her promise to join him in London.

And Edward Churchill, listening, thought that he must be going mad. She was speaking like a rather vain and very silly girl, fluttered and excited by a first love affair. She talked of this common fellow, this coarse vulgarian, as though he were one of the Knights of the Round Table. She had forgotten all her old niceness of instinct, her respect for good birth and breeding, her desire for the charms and graces of life; and merely because an elderly, sandy, flabby, impudent, half-bankrupt tradesman said he was fond of her, she had become fond of him—so fond that she was willing to make this preposterous marriage, incur the ridicule of all sensible people, and break her son's heart.

"Ever since your visit," she went on, "it has been a most dreadful struggle for me. I was afraid of you."

"Afraid!"

"I had given my promise, and I meant to keep it. I told him that arguments were no use. I could not answer his arguments—they seemed too just. He used to urge—in his chaffing way—that at any rate I had reached years of discretion, that I was a free agent, that I had a *right* to do what I thought best. And he said no one could accuse me of not having done my duty to you all. I had brought you up, and one after another you had left me. He never said anything disparaging of you, dear—far from it. He always praises you—he sincerely admires you; but he said in this you were asking too much of me. And he said—what I have felt so often myself—that, supposing I went and set up house with you, sooner or later you yourself would marry—and then where should I be? The sacrifice would have been in vain."

"The sacrifice!"

"I mean, I should have deprived him of happiness, and really lost it myself—and all to no purpose. Edward, I am only repeating his arguments. But they did not shake my resolve to keep the promise to you. No, what moved me was the sight of his misery. I saw plainly that I was driving him to despair. I thought, 'What will my feelings be, if he goes and commits suicide?' Edward, you can't ever know what I have been through in these last weeks. It has been one long dreadful struggle. I wanted to do what was right—I had to choose—I had to decide."

And Edward thought, with unspeakable bitterness of spirit, "Grotesqueness is always an attribute that heightens the effect of tragedy. If the man were other than he is, my pain could not be so poisonously stinging. As she says, she had to choose. Her choice lay plain before her: Mr. Barrett and his love, or me and mine. And she has chosen Mr. Barrett."

Then the thought, "I must not be selfish. I must not think of myself; I must think only of her." He had not said a single unkind word to her, and he did not fear that he would say one; but now he kissed her again, laid his hand very softly on her grey hair, and tried to smile encouragingly.

"My own boy, tell me that you understand—that you release me from my promise. I can't be happy unless I feel that you forgive me. Listen, dear, I ought to have told you this before. I wrote to Tom and Charles—and I have heard from both of them. They approve—they don't mind. Let me feel that you all three do not blame—or reproach me."

She had written to the other two—to the two that scarcely loved her; but of him whose whole life had been spent in loving her she was afraid.

"We want to get away from here. We think of Brighton. He has always wished to end his days at Brighton. We have heard of several houses—in fact, he has entered into treaty for one of them—provisionally, of course. He wants to take me down to look at it."

And Edward thought, "Yes, he and I have been rivals even in that too. We have each been selecting a house for her; but she is going to his house, not mine." Then once more came the thought, "I must not think of myself; I must think only of her."

She continued her story, pressing his hand affectionately, speaking quite confidently and cheerfully now; and he felt pity and shame. He felt as a father who listens to the tale of a daughter's disgrace, like a friend learning of a friend's secret sins, like a priest when a penitent confesses that he has committed sacrilege.

But every now and then, in spite of all his efforts after detachment from the point of view of self, there would come a stab of memory.

"Yes, this is not just any woman who is disgracing herself, it is my mother. This is not merely another revelation of foolishness where one hoped for wisdom; it is the overthrow of all my faith in womankind. The person who is going to do a quite unworthy thing in a supremely foolish manner, who will forfeit the respect of friends, and be laughed at by strangers, is she from whom I drew life, and then strength, and then hope."

He did not for a moment attempt to dissuade her from her project. His knowledge of human nature, although it had not been great enough to prepare him for this surprise, was at least sufficient to make him sure that the catastrophe could not be averted. She spoke of obtaining his consent; but, even if perhaps she did not admit it to herself, she was quite determined. People did these things in the East End as well as in quiet cathedral cities; widows of over fifty married second, third, or fourth husbands. And, with another lance-like throb of pain, he remembered much pleasant fun at the Verschoyles' rectory about an elderly cook who was unexpectedly leaving. Mrs. Verschoyle could not guess why; and the grey-haired cook, puckering her apron, at last coyly confessed that she was leaving to get married.

"Mother," he said, interrupting her, "when is it to be?"

"Well, dear, we hope before Christmas. You know, poor Mrs. Barrett died more than a year ago."

Then she began to thank him for his gentleness and forbearance, saying that he had proved true to his nature, and reminding him that until these years of their enforced separation she had looked only to him for comfort and support.

And finally she spoke about the furniture. That, she said, was what now preyed upon her mind. "It is as though I had cheated you, dear. I led you to expect it—and now I am leaving you with an empty house. Of course, you have been counting on the furniture."

He bowed his head, so that she should not see his eyes, and there came a sound from his throat that was half a cough and half a sob. He was stifling the words that had nearly said themselves: "I was counting on you, mother, more than on your furniture."

He returned to London almost immediately after this interview, and in the train he sat with folded arms, scarcely changing his attitude throughout the journey. It was dark now, so that if he had looked back to catch that last picturesque glimpse of St. Dunstan's, he could have seen nothing. But he had no wish to see it; he hoped that he might never see it again. He thought dully of what is said about people in his situation to describe their state. Writers, using stereotyped phrases, say, "He felt stunned, confused, as if he had received a blow on the head." Or they say, "He felt paralysed." Or they say, "He felt like a man who has undergone a severe surgical operation, and cannot shake off the dreams of anæsthesia or recover strength enough even to lift his head." And Edward Churchill thought, "Yes, I feel all that. But I feel more;" and dully he sought for another simile. "I feel like a small child who started in the morning with its parents and guardians and other children; and then, after playing with them happily all day, at dusk finds itself suddenly alone, and thinks, This is the awful thing that has often been talked about. I am lost. Yes, I am lost!"

He repeated the words aloud—"I am lost;" and then, looking up, saw that his fellow-passengers were staring at him questioningly.

He walked from the London terminus, and it was late when he reached St. Bede's. Alone in his empty house he wandered up and down, turning on all the lights, going in and out of the rooms, looking at the blankness and the emptiness. Whenever he paused, trivial little ironical words suggested themselves, and sometimes he uttered them with a feebly explanatory tone: such as, "This is a disappointment. . . . Not at all what I counted on. . . . Quite a shock, when I first had to face it."

Then would come big words, like great guns fired from a distance and yet making noise enough to silence all the adjacent splutter of musketry. Thus it seemed when he thought: "Two things I have trusted—God and my mother. And one of them has failed me."

XXIII

He was alone with his religion now, and subtly its character began to change. He lost his joy in the splendours of ritual; the significances of symbolism ceased to interest him; even the crowning mystery of sacrificial rites appeared to him of less paramount importance. Only essentials mattered.

It was as if his grief, his disgust, his vicarious shame, had driven him irrevocably from the realm of refined ideas and forced him to take a firm standpoint on broad unshakable principles. He could not think as hitherto of the quality of things that are beautiful. When he looked at the bare branches of the plane tree he did not remember the green leaves they had borne such a little while ago. He had no desire nowadays to go to the lovely Church of the Crucifixion. Several times he saw that graceful young woman, the sight of whom used to stir his mind with pretty fancies, and now he hardly glanced at her pale face or brown hair, and had not the slightest wish ever to hear her voice again. For a long time he could not even bring himself to visit Mrs. Verschoyle, although he knew well that she would not wound him with a visible sign of the sympathy that she had so delicately hidden in one or two letters after he told her of his altered plans.

He just stuck to his ordinary work, seeking nothing outside it; as though all dreams were finished, and, awakening, he had accepted the hard law of facts. Life is ugly, and one must not shirk its ugliness.

Rising one morning, he said to himself, "This is my mother's wedding day;" and he repeated the words again and again. He had asked to be excused from attending the ceremony, and his request had been at once granted; but, as soon as the happy pair should be well established in their Brighton house, he was to visit them. His mother could not let him off this visit or permit him to postpone it indefinitely, and he looked forward to it with shrinking dread as the consummation of his pain. All through the wedding day he was haunted by pictures of the past and the future. How could she bring herself to do it? Oh, how could she so forget her own legend? And he thought that this real tragedy was more poignantly distressing than the fable of Shakespeare's play. For to him the distress was far worse than for Hamlet. Comparatively, Hamlet and the Queen had been nothing to each other.

He could not sleep, he could not eat, the idea of what was happening continued to be intolerable.

Nevertheless, while the new year was still young, he dutifully fulfilled his engagement, and went down to Brighton to stay for a few days with Mr. and Mrs. Barrett.

Their house was situated on the East Cliff, in one of the old terraces long since deserted by fashion, and Mr. Barrett, exercising all his professional skill, had secured it as an astounding bargain. It was small and neat—just the right size for the St. Dunstan's furniture. Here, then, Edward saw what was like the ghost of his childhood's home; every chair and table reminding him of vanished days, the pictures on the walls seeming to whisper of his dead father; and in the midst of it the base intruder and supplanter, spreading himself out large, beaming with self-satisfaction, exuding vulgar triumph. Here, too, Edward for the first time heard the man call his mother Edith, watched her after dinner while she fetched a pair of slippers, a tobacco jar, a pipe, and suffered more acutely than he would have believed possible.

The greater must include the less. Since she had married the man, one should have been prepared for all the rest. Already she was altogether different. Her manner, her voice had changed; she even did her hair differently. Of course, outwardly as well as inwardly, she must be different: she was now the comrade, the obedient helpmate, the other half of Mr. Barrett. Already, in a dull kind way, he had completely dominated her. The adoring slave had become the tolerant master. Without the slightest harshness, merely by the dead weight of companionship, he dictated her acts, her words, her thoughts. He would do so always—he would simply obliterate in her all that had made her what she was. And yet—last incredible, prodigiously illogical truth—she was quite contented.

While he talked, she listened appreciatively. His conversation—which for the main part consisted of a rapid sequence of platitudinous nonsense—appeared to be all that she desired as an intellectual treat. When he thought he had made a joke, he looked at her in a certain winking familiar style, and she immediately also thought that he had made a joke, and laughed with as much pleasure as if he had really made one.

To Edward—of an evening, after she had gone to bed—he was terrible, nerve-inflaming, poisonously asphyxiating. He sat rocking himself in the late Mr. Churchill's swing chair, smoking and twaddling.

He called Brighton "London-by-the-Sea," spoke of it also as "Doctor Brighton," and said that, althought the fact might prove him to be an odd original sort of creature, he must confess that the sound of the waves as they gently beat upon the shore was very pleasant to him. He said, too, that he firmly believed tobacco to be a blessing if used in moderation. It soothed the brain. But tobacco, like many other things, might be condemned as evil "when carried to excess."

"Moderation, Edward. That should be one's watchword."

Then he talked a little scandal about the lady who lived next door. She was by herself during the week, but a gentleman appeared on Saturday. This week-end personage might be her lawful wedded husband, but on the other hand he might not.

"I have told your mamma to be on her guard, and not to encourage advances from so doubtful a quarter. We shall have no difficulty in building up our little circle of friends, and we would like them to be of the right sort."

And then Mr. Barrett suggested "Bedfordshire." Cumbrously getting out of the swing chair and stretching himself, he took a last proud survey of the comfortable, nicely furnished room, and said, "Now, isn't this better for both of us than moping out our lives by ourselves? You see it, now, don't you, Ted? Mamma and I, in joining forces, did the wise and proper thing, didn't we?"

Edward opened his bedroom window and filled his lungs with the cold night air. He was almost suffocating. He looked at the stars, and thought of their remoteness; he listened to the waves, and to his ears their voices spoke only of sadness. If any doubt or hope had lingered, he knew now that his mother had gone from him for ever. If she had died, the separation would have seemed less crushingly final.

About a month after the Brighton excursion he had a meeting with his two brothers. By arrangement they all three dined together at a restaurant near Piccadilly Circus, and, going westward to this appointment, Edward felt a rapid revival of brotherly affection and an immense longing to renew a natural intercourse that had been too long neglected.

But alas, it was impossible. Some glow of warmth there was, a flare of instinct, and then numbness, coldness. In truth they seemed to him utter strangers, two worldly common fellows, gross of mind and gross of tongue. Tom was big and loud, and blustering—prosperous now, he declared—the typical colonial wanderer, who romances about past hardships and brags about future ease. Charles was lean, rather seedy-looking in spite of raffish ornaments of attire; he said Europe was played-out, rotten, no longer the place for a white man; and he intended shortly to go back with Tom to Australia. Meanwhile, both of them, evidently, were enjoying all the pleasures of the town. Tom spoke plainly of the temporary solace afforded by the opposite sex to those fortunate enough to have plenty of money in their pockets, and then, laughing, checked the flow of such revelations. "I must respect the cloth, Ted, old boy." And almost in the same breath he was talking of their mother.

Neither he nor Charles appeared to recollect that ancient horror of the stepfather, or their contempt for Mr. Barrett. The marriage had not ruffled them. They thought it foolish, but they didn't care.

"Women are all the same," said Tom sententiously; "and I believe the older they get the sillier they get."

Charles looked sage: seeming to say without words that in his varied experience of women wickedness rather than silliness had been the trouble.

"But as to the dear mater," said Tom, "well, it means, of course, that nothing will ever come *our* way now. Number Two will see to that. I don't mind. I'm all right—on the up-grade, going to wallow in it before I've done. And I say, 'Long may she enjoy her own, and do what she likes with it afterwards.' Let's drink her health."

Edward left them drinking together. Ever afterwards, when he thought of them, he had that farewell picture—of the two unfamiliar-looking men seated at a disordered table in the now empty dining-room, with flushed faces and stupid eyes, talking garrulously, while a waiter yawned, furtively read a newspaper, and pined for them to go away. The strongest combined effort of memory and imagination could not make this picture blend with the other one of two clean-minded, frank-eyed, healthy boys, whom he had honoured and loved. These two men did not want him; he could not help them; in thought he bade them good-bye.

Thus all ties of family had been broken, not a single personal affection was left to him. But the blank must be somehow filled—that was a necessity. Mankind in the mass was surely large enough to supply what had been withdrawn by a few individuals.

Gradually he furnished his house, in a rough and ready way, buying the things for room after room as they were wanted. This was home, and he was now settling down in it. His housekeeper was a Mrs. Clough, the deserted wife of a bricklayer who had gone to Canada. For years she had worked at an Aldgate steam laundry, tramping to and fro every day, and at last getting knocked down by a meat van. Edward Churchill went to see her at the London Hospital, and the kind doctors who had mended her broken thigh, patched her perforated lung, and bulged out her crushed ribs, told him that she could never again be up to the heavy work of her laundry. If the laundry people took her back and let her limp about for a week, they would infallibly sack her at the end of it. She was, however, quite up to the light work of Denmark House; her daughters, grown-up factory women, came to stay with her when out of a job; she adored her new master, and would have been perfectly happy but for the fear that one day her bad husband might come back from Canada and upset the apple-cart.

In the large, bare drawing-room some rough cupboards had been fitted, and in these were piles of the Prayer-books and Bibles used for classes, rolled maps of the Holy Land and Syria that came out for lectures on the Passion or Paul's voyages, coloured flags of the signalling section of the cadet corps, and so on. Near the windows there was a large table and desk, with a metal crucifix attached to the wall above it. When the boudoir door stood open, one had a peep into Churchill's bedroom—a painted chest of drawers, the narrow iron bed, with another crucifix near it.

There were no curtains in either room, but in both the richness and splendour of the carpet struck an incongruous note. Those packing-cases had at last been opened, and the books that they contained so long were bestowed on one side of the big room in ranges of deal shelves as yet unpainted. For the walls he had purchased some religious prints in black frames. There were many wooden chairs for the bulk of his visitors, and two wicker arm-chairs with red cloth cushions for superior people. From the packing-cases had also emerged some Indian clubs, boxing-gloves, a model oar, and other modest trophies or mementos of his college boating club; and all these articles, together with small knicknacks dating from Oxford days, made a scattered and untidy decoration that Mrs. Clough assiduously dusted and greatly cherished.

The bedroom that should have been Mrs. Churchill's was permanently occupied by "the old gentleman." This was Edward's friend, Mr. Philbrick. After a sharp attack of sciatica, that danger of the workhouse had recurred; the old chap's capacity for work had dwindled down to something very small indeed; Edward told him in effect that he must work no more, his future need not worry him, he might take his ease at Denmark House.

Early of a morning the host used to go into the visitor's room, sit on the edge of his bed, and enjoy a little chat. However early the hour, Mr. Philbrick was always awake, and generally smoking. He sat high in the bed, screwing up his wrinkled face, winking his bright birdlike eyes, and placidly puffing out tobacco clouds of almost overpowering strength and rankness.

"This is my luckserry," he would say. "To lay here before breakfast, knowing I don't have to get up till when I choose. I don't sleep much—we old fellers don't require it, and I don't miss it. The *rest* is sufficient—the pleasure of the bed itself—and what I call the luckserry."

Sometimes they read the collect of the day together. Formal prayer, with kneeling out of bed or on the bed, would naturally have interfered with the luxurious sensations, and Churchill never suggested it. But Mr. Philbrick liked "a bit of 'oly readin'," cheerfully putting down his pipe, and repeating the sacred names with unction and contentment.

"Thank you very kindly, sir. I shall be up and about before you're in from yer fust round. . . . Er, might I respec'fully ast you to 'and me the matches?"

Other guests, for long and short periods, were young priests. Amongst them was a consumptive, and him Churchill dispatched on a sea voyage. Another of them had broken the vows of the brotherhood to which he belonged. Another had got into dire disgrace by drink, and was in danger of being inhibited. These were difficult cases sent to him by the Verschoyles.

But generally he found the guests himself—honest workers in their dire need, when no work was forthcoming; offenders just released from the clutches of the law and anxious to start fair again, yet ready to return to crime; feeble, helpless, hopeless incompetents; the wreckage thrown in his way by the ocean of life. He took them in when they wanted shelter; he turned them out when they lingered because of mere idleness. He was not softly kind to them. He liked their company, but their room was so urgently needed. And thus, little by little, Denmark House became recognised as a sort of hostel or place of refuge instead of a strictly private residence.

He was doing much for the parish in other ways. He had provided funds for a new mission room on the southern boundary, for a fourth curate, and for repairs to the fabric of the church. That dividing line between capital and income ceased to restrict his expenditure. Why should he hoard any longer? When money was wanted to gladden the heart of Walsden, he sold out some stock and produced it. But he spent freely now on his own account, without Walsden's advice—gifts made from hand to hand, grants in aid of young men who wished to emigrate, marriage portions; donations to a foundlings' home at Barking; maintenance of seaside camps, after the source of ordinary subscriptions ran dry.

His position in the parish every week seemed to strengthen itself. Money at St. Bede's went a long way, and its immediate effects were readily perceptible. The people regarded him as an opulent prince, some one far above the vicar. But Mr. Walsden never had the least jealousy in this regard; he gloried in the possession of his rich curate; and, although often rebuking greedy members of the flock for their outrageous claims, he told Churchill, "They love you for yourself, not for your money."

And, indeed, he was greatly trusted. People came to him in their trouble, asking spiritual comfort and desiring nothing else. The women especially, of all ages, sought interviews with Mr. Churchill. It was useless now to send them to the vicarage, to Mr. Gardiner, or to Mr. Nape. They would not go.

He used to let them talk to him, and he listened, saying very little. Before they left he gave them a few words of simple advice, telling them to be brave, to be clean, to take care of themselves—their bodies as well as their souls. "When everything else goes wrong at home, don't go wrong yourself"—and so on. Sometimes he lent them books: health manuals, domestic treatises, tracts on the virtue of self-respect.

Always that change of his estimates in regard to the relative importance of the spiritual and the material need was continuing. More and more his interest was aroused in work outside the Church world. He used to go to the London Hospital and admire the marvellous organisation of the vast establishment. He had made many friends among the doctors there, and he enjoyed his long quiet talks with them when he could catch them off duty. They told him so much that he had never properly understood till now. He also frequently visited a small hospital in the Poplar district; and here he sat by the bedsides of sailors, hearing tales of the sea—of perils bravely encountered, of avoidable sufferings cheerfully borne, of the floating hell that a ship may become when nature and men join hands in the work of pitiless cruelty. Whenever he was able to do so he spent an afternoon at the orphans' or waifs' institution that he had recently discovered at Barking. He loved these boys who had never known a father's name. And, wherever he was, he thought of the folly of mankind in still passively accepting evils that ages and ages ago should for ever have been rendered impossible.

Walsden saw the change in his curate's mental attitude, and one day he frankly spoke of it. It was characteristic of him that the place he chose for speaking was the open street, and that he did not find time to finish what he wished to say. They were standing in the narrow side street, by the door of the southern mission room, and he began abruptly about Churchill's sermons. "I wish," he said, "that you would revert to your original line—the line, you know, that made such a stir among us. Rub it into them again about *prayer*. That *lifted* them. Last Sunday night I thought you got a bit too business-like—too much like a lecture on practical politics."

"Oh, is that so?"

"I thought so;" and Walsden beamed, and gave Churchill a friendly slap on the shoulder. "With any one else, I should beat about the bush, perhaps—not that I'm good at roundabouts—but with you, I know I'm safe. You've always been too big to be touchy. . . . Good morning. Hope your wife's better." He had interrupted himself to speak to a workman who was slouching toward some other workmen at an opposite corner of the street. "What was I saying? Yes, tell 'em to pray. *That* was the line. Nowadays you've got off it. It's all 'Help one another,' instead of 'Pray for one another.' "

"Is it?" And Churchill promised that he would preach again on prayer. His sermons seemed to be less important than in the past, he did not prepare them so laboriously, he had no personal pleasure in delivering them, and he refused all invitations to hold forth beyond the confines of St. Bede's.

"Thanks. And in this connection there was a hint about our old, little controversy—receiving confessions, you know. Well——"

But just then somebody spoke to Mr. Walsden from the opposite pavement. It was a big, black-coated man with a bowler hat on the back of his head, who came hurrying. As he passed he made a gesture with his hand, as though waving off the vicar, and spoke in a loud, self-important style.

"Good morning to you. I can't stop now."

Mr. Walsden had not desired this personage to stop, and he muttered contemptuously. "Very good. Don't apologise. We don't want you;" and he stood looking after him.

A few doors farther down the street the pavement was blocked by the little knot of workmen; and the big man took one of these by the shoulders, pushed him off the pavement, and, having passed, called back truculently, "That'll teach you manners. Get out of the light when you see people coming."

"Yes," said Walsden, "but who'll teach *you* manners—you pig?" And he turned to Edward Churchill. "Did you see that? Did you notice that man? They say he'll be sent to Parliament. I'll tell you all about him some time. Thank goodness, he has left the parish. I must fly. Ta-ta."

Whatever precepts on the subject of confession the vicar had intended to repeat, they were probably not needed in order to reinforce his well-known rules of conduct. Churchill had always obeyed him, and now, perhaps not only as a result from this habit of obedience, the difference of opinion between them had almost vanished. The link in what Churchill used to call his "straight sequence" had worn so thin that he questioned if it were a link at all, or merely an excrescence. If the chain of faith could hold together without it, then knock it off or let it go. Since he and the vicar were now of one mind in their struggle to hold fast to essentials, they could scarcely be far apart in their method of dealing with a surface difficulty. Churchill did not particularly think of this question of confession; and perhaps, if he had done so, he would have understood that he now considered Walsden to be right. Perhaps no good ever came of men confessing their sins to men. Let them open their hearts to God—let them keep it all between God and themselves.

Certainly he felt no qualms in sending people to the Communion Service without previous absolution. When the women came to see him, he did not ask them to lay bare any secret. He looked at them, and he seemed to understand. When, in every varied tone of hope or fear, they seemed to ask him the one great question, "What shall I do to be saved?" he told them to believe in Christ. "Believe in Him, and love Him. That is all."

He used to think so often, "If one does not steadfastly believe in the glory to be achieved hereafter, then what a hideous nightmare here and now!" And of all essential duties of a priest the greatest must surely be to strengthen faith. "It is not enough to make these people believe once, and then leave them to their own devices; one must always be sustaining the belief. For belief, however strong, may grow weak and quickly perish."

Some of the boys at that orphanage were fierce and wild, requiring stern discipline; but there were none that did not show pleasure at the sight of Edward Churchill, and none that he could not manage if entrusted to his charge. When the summer drew near he used to present himself on half holidays, and take about twenty orphans of all sizes for an afternoon trip upon the river Lea. He had hired an immense tub of a boat that held the whole party; and he taught the bigger lads how to row—three of them to an oar, bench after bench, like Roman slaves, splashing and toiling. The little ones were in the stern, all about him, chattering, gesticulating. A few perhaps he smiled at more than at the rest, noticing their puny arms, wizened faces, abnormally developed intelligences, and remembering that they had but lately been rescued from the streets.

"Oh, ain't this jolly?" That was the treble chorus. The peace and happiness changed them, elevated them, made them sweeter, gladder, better in one afternoon.

Sometimes he sculled the whole barge alone, while all rested and watched.

"I'll take you as far as the white pier."

"Oh, Mr. Churchill, can you do it? You must be strong as a giant."

And very slowly he made the huge boat move—faster—still on. The boys crowed, and cheered, and thought it miraculous.

He rowed till the sweat poured off him, till his chest seemed about to crack; but he felt as if, for a time, he was carrying their burdens, as if his effort had lifted the cruel weight that the sins of the world had laid upon these innocent ones. He yearned with love for the little souls, while his muscles seemed to take fire, his lungs change to dry paper, and his heart become a pump that filled his veins with pain instead of blood—he was almost killing himself, but would give his life and not regret its loss. Lightermen on the banks watched also, their faces lit with friendly grins. "Brayvo, guv'nor! Well done, sir!" And still he plodded on, until the boat drew level with the white pier. Then he stopped, came back to his seat in the stern, gasping, spasmodically quivering, feeling as if he had been broken on the wheel. But he was all right directly, able to joke and laugh.

"Hasn't it hurt you, sir?" And a small hand was placed upon his aching knee.

"No, my dear boy, of course not. I wanted to do it."

That was his paramount need—to give himself, to spend himself, to gain the peace that comes from exhaustion. And except when doing it, he was a profoundly unhappy man.

XXIV

In obedience to the vicar's request, Edward Churchill had prepared his new sermon on prayer. But before the time came to deliver it he suffered another disillusionment, was forced to relinquish another pretty idea, and once more experienced a deepened sense of loss and loneliness.

Walsden, after speaking of some members of a dock-labourers' trade union, began to talk about the secretary of the union, Mr. Robert Vickers, and explained that this was the man they had seen pushing humble folk into the gutter. "Yes, he is lord of the poor fellows—lives on their pennies, and yet bullies them. But they believe in him, and submit to anything. As I told you, he used to live here—had offices for two societies that kept him going as long as they lasted—and I couldn't persuade even our own people that they were fools for letting him bleed them."

Walsden said this Vickers was a thorough bad lot. He drank, and he was viciously immoral. Some years ago he had been charged with a criminal assault on one of his typewriting girls, but the charge broke down. "Once I told Mr. Vickers, to his face and before company, exactly what I thought of him; and yet—could you credit it?—he has had the impudence to write asking me and the St. Bede's clergy to go and hear him spout next Wednesday at the Red Eagle tavern."

"Vickers!" said Churchill. "There is a young woman of that name. No connection of his, I suppose?"

"Yes, his wife."

Churchill at first thought this must be a mistake. His *Miss* Vickers could not possibly be Walsden's *Mrs.* Vickers. Nevertheless she was. "Yes, yes," said Walsden—"very nice girl, friend of my wife's. She couldn't really have told you she was single. You've got hold of the wrong end of the stick."

"Why did she marry such a brute?"

"Ah. Who can say? Found him attractive, one must guess. Women are so curious—in these affairs. She must regret it by now, I should think."

It was a shock to find that such a girl—not coarse and common, apparently altogether the reverse—should care for such a man. And beyond the discomfort caused by the shattered ideal, there was something repellent in the notion that she was married at all—that she belonged to anybody whomsoever. He had woven his fable about her, thinking of her always as solitary, virginally mysterious and aloof, bravely isolated from all commonplace dependences or supports. Then he felt indignant with her herself. Why had she allowed him to persist in a foolish error? Why had she posed as a single girl merely because he imagined her to be one? Perhaps she had not consciously done this; perhaps the misunderstanding had been entirely of his own making and fostering. When he searched his memory of their first meeting, he seemed to recall that she had merely told him her name was Lilian Vickers, and he, jumping to conclusions, had written her down as Miss. Probably, or at least possibly, he had never in their subsequent meetings addressed her as Miss Vickers. Or if he had, perhaps she did not notice—or, noticing, perhaps she thought the mistake was not worth correcting. She might have thought that, as they were practically strangers, it could not in the least matter. The whole thing would appear a trifle to her. But it did not appear a trifle to him.

He could not get it out of his mind.

He thought of her so much that he put himself to the trouble of obtaining further information about her husband. From Mrs. Walsden and others he gathered that Vickers had risen in the world and now rather sunk again. He was a socialist, an agitator, a tub-thumper. The dockers' union, started and practically governed by himself, was as yet small, but he boastfully declared that it would develop into something tremendous, and he counted on its force to thrust him into Parliament. He was Church of England. He always made a point of this in his public utterances, and tried to keep in with church-folk, although never himself seen in church. His wife Lilian taught French as well as the piano, and was truly religious. Perhaps Vickers encouraged her to go to church, to attend classes and lectures, and thus save him the performance of an irksome duty. Anyhow, it was plain that he clung to the church connection as something that might be useful to him politically.

From humble friends Churchill learned that if people trusted Mr. Vickers, many were afraid of him.

"Why afraid?"

"Well, natch'rally, because of all them union chaps of his," said Dance, the greengrocer. "It's ev'dent. He'd think nothing of setting on a dozen of his roughs to slip into you with their fists. He did do it. Man he'd had a row with, was set upon and precious near killed."

But not content with hearsay evidence, Churchill took an opportunity of studying the man himself. He sat among the audience at the back of the room when Mr. Vickers gave his Red Eagle oration.

Evidently not a gentleman, Vickers seemed, however, to be well educated; at any rate, he showed all the surface signs of education, and apparently he had been at pains to learn how to speak in public. The matter of the discourse was nonsense—the usual diatribes against the upper classes, fulsome praise of all horney-handed toilers, and promises of the Utopia that might be expected as soon as Labour organised itself and was able to secure adequate representation in the House of Commons. But his manner—when considered only in regard to the purposes of the occasion—was good. He had a swaggering confidence and a spurious bonhomie that imposed on ignorant hearers. One moment he overawed them by his learning, and the next moment flattered them by an assumption of entire equality. He frowned, bellowed, made violent gestures, and then treated them to a joke and helped it with a loud and affectedly jovial laugh. Churchill instinctively detested him, and felt that the worst that could be said of him must be true.

Physically, he was a big, powerful-looking man, with a broad chest, heavy shoulders, and perhaps rather poor legs. Standing on the platform, he looked very tall, and in fact was probably an inch or two over six feet. He seemed to be about thirty-five years of age; he had dark, closely cropped hair and a reddish moustache; and there was a fatness and looseness about the lower parts of his cheeks, as well as a baggy fullness beneath the chin, that suggested sensuality and self-indulgence. He was just a pig and a brute. Yet Churchill could see in him a sort of blackguardly handsomeness that, allowing for the deterioration of years, might attract—and even greatly attract—vulgar silly women.

Then he thought of the delicate prettiness and slim grace of the man's wife. Could there be truth in what was said by his brother Tom, by Walsden, by everybody else—that all women are alike?

When Sunday evening came and he preached his sermon on prayer, it happened that Mrs. Vickers was in the church. He saw her at once, but he would not look at her again. He thought, "If I look at her, I shall be reminded of ugly things; my mind will wander, and I shall lose the thread of what I am to say. Walsden wants me to tell them to pray for one another, and I must do it as forcibly as I can."

In the vestry after the service Walsden declared that he had done it magnificently. The handkerchiefs had come out in all directions, and Walsden himself had counted five people weeping at one time. "You really did warm them up—quite in the old style—when you said that bit about unhappiness. What was it again? 'Pray for those who are unhappy, whether you love them or whether you hate them.' That was it, wasn't it? Capital!"

Churchill was not going to sup at the vicarage to-night, and when presently he went down the empty church to the main door the lights were turned out except in the western gallery. Mr. White leaned over the balustrade by the organ curtains, and told him that the doors had not yet been locked.

Beyond the swing doors the porch was quite dark, the outer door standing ajar and admitting a little light from the street lamps to guide one. As he passed, there came a sound from somewhere near the foot of the gallery stairs that startled him. It was like a suppressed sobbing.

"Who is it? What is it?"

And out of the darkness somebody spoke to him.

"Mr. Churchill, will you pray for me? I am very unhappy."

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I will pray for you—Mrs. Vickers. . . . It is Mrs. Vickers, is it not? . . . Good-night."

And he went out of the porch. She did not follow him, and after a few moments he came back again.

"Mrs. Vickers"—and he spoke now more gently and with greater friendliness than before, "would you care to come and see me at Denmark House some day, and let us talk about your troubles—whatever they are?"

"I don't know. . . . Yes, I *would* like—if you are sure you don't mind. I've no right to bother you. I'm not in the parish."

"Send me a line to say when you are coming."

"May I come to-morrow afternoon?"

"Yes. What time?"

"Six o'clock—if that would suit you."

"Yes." And again he bade her good-night.

He walked home, thinking, "This is very strange. It is as though she had answered my secret thoughts."

She did regret her marriage, bitterly and desperately. In their long quiet talk together, although she never once said it explicitly, Churchill assured himself of the obvious fact in a dozen different ways. And before their talk was over she had entirely re-established herself in his mind. She was truly what she had seemed.

She was dreadfully shy and nervous at first, making apologies for wasting his time and explaining that she had no justification. She said that yesterday had been a long and tiring day for her; it had been difficult to get away from home; she was late in starting for St. Bede's, and then the trams were full and she walked most of the distance, hurrying. So that when she reached the church she was perhaps rather overwrought, and the sermon moving her greatly, she broke down in a silly manner of which she was now ashamed. This morning she had intended to write to say that she would not trouble him to receive her, but then she had thought he might not understand. So she had come.

And Churchill perfectly understood that she had come because she wanted to come. She, like so many other of his visitors, was impelled by the most simple and direct motives, although to her they might seem obscure. Life had rendered her piteously sad; she longed to speak of her sadness; she craved for human sympathy, and as yet could not find it.

Divine aid she possessed; but, although her faith disclosed itself as beautiful and steadfast, this was not quite enough. She desired, she needed to hear the voice of a fellow-creature telling that others are bearing their sadness bravely; that she, too, must be brave and fear nothing.

This, in effect, was what Edward Churchill told her; and he saw that he had succeeded in comforting her, strengthening her, and giving her fresh courage.

He begged her to come and see him again whenever she desired to do so; and from time to time she repeatd her visits. Rapidly they became able to talk freely, as though they had known each other for a long time; but she always maintained her reticence in regard to the actual causes of her misery. She hinted at them, but never stated them. It did not matter: he could guess them all, and, thinking of them, his heart melted in pity.

He knew her history now. Her parents died while she was still a child; she had eaten the bread of charity during her last three years at school; then, as governess in a country house, she had met Vickers, and married him a month after their first meeting. Churchill could imagine it—the man coming with his swagger, his flashy rhetoric, his affected enthusiasms, and the poor little lonely girl thinking, "This is the grand chivalrous knight who is going to rescue me." And instead of a courtly knight, he had proved a brutal jailer. He had been systematically unkind, depriving her of love, and yet not allowing her freedom from the ugly manifestations that only loved wives should know. Like a hog, he had trampled on the pretty flower that he had snatched at and uprooted.

There had been a baby, who died; and the young mother's grief had almost broken her heart. Yet Churchill instinctively understood that she wished for no other child to take the place of her lost one. It was bad to be childless; it was worse to have children of such a father.

One night, during an illness of the St. Bede's organist, she came over to play the organ instead of Mrs. Walsden. It seemed to Churchill that she played splendidly, not only better than poor Mrs. Walsden, but as well as any one he had ever heard playing; she made their organ seem as grand an instrument as Father Bryan's; she filled the church with rolling, swelling melody. Afterwards he walked with her as far as the tram-lines, and it chanced that, as an escort, he proved of some slight service. Outside a public-house three drunken men were indisposed to let them pass, and, had she been by herself, they would unquestionably have caused her annoyance.

At sight of these drunken reeling men and at the sound of their thick, loud voices, Lilian Vickers betrayed a feeling of horror unusual in anybody accustomed to the East End; and Churchill thought, "Yes, that is the sort of thing she has to face at home sometimes."

He put her into her tram, and stood looking after it, thinking of what she was going back to.

Why should a sweet, good, patient creature like that be so sorely tried? It was a question—if she ever put it fairly to herself—so difficult to answer that it might shake the very foundations of her faith. He thought of this peril. If she lost her faith, what would become of her? Then indeed one might call her miserable. This thought preyed upon his mind fearfully, and he determined to discuss her case in all its aspects with the vicar. Walsden had great natural wisdom, as well as endless experience; he might be able to suggest how best one could help her.

But Walsden on this occasion was both unsympathetic and stupid. His general view of the situation seemed to be that, having made her bed, Mrs. Vickers must lie on it; and he said, as his only special advice, "I should drop it, if I were you. Yes, just leave it alone."

Edward Churchill could not, of course, leave it alone. Implicitly, she was asking him for assistance; he could not fold his hands, and altogether disregard the appeal.

"You see," said Walsden reflectively, "as I found out years ago, when a married woman comes like this, and makes her confession——"

"Mrs. Vickers," said Churchill, almost warmly, "has made no confession to me. Obviously not, or I shouldn't be talking about it to you. No, I have had several interviews with her, and we discussed nothing but broad principles. Nevertheless, I can see that she is utterly wretched with that man. You know what he is, yourself."

"Yes, quite so. But he is her husband. She married him for better, for worse."

And, unnecessarily, stupidly, Walsden harked back to confessions. "There's the trouble—these women. It was that which first put me against it. I saw so much of it in the Midlands. I used to say, 'If it's anything you could talk over with your elder brother—anything he could put right for you—come and tell me all about it. Just consider I'm your brother.' And to make them understand, I called them Sister. 'Well, now'—Sister Alice—or Sister Kate—if I knew their Christian name, 'what's the little rumpus?' I found the wisdom of following this line, because——"

"Yes, no doubt," said Churchill, "but all that does not in the least apply to the present case."

"No, no," said Walsden, "I am merely talking in the air—defending my theories, which, I well know, you have loyally respected, although opposed to your own. No, I'd forgotten all about poor Mrs. Vickers. As to *her* case, I've given you my opinion. . . . When young Nape joined us, I said just the same to him, and so I did to Grevil. I told them, "Beware of the women who come to a clergyman in their domestic and private troubles.' Why, at Clackhaven," and Walsden laughed good-humouredly, "the mill-girls would try to 'take on the parson'—give him 'a teasing,' as they called it—and leave their sweethearts waiting outside in the street to make them jealous. Yes, and the matrons too—who ought to know better—getting spoony on the curate! Human nature is the same all the world over. Women are all one. If I found any nonsense—of *any* sort—I made some excuse and got my wife into the room—to break off. They understood. It reminded them."

Then Walsden laughed again, and spoke enthusiastically. "But Africa was the place!" And he said a few words about dusky belles who disturbed his tent by their artlessly improper advances.

All this was extraordinarily distasteful to Churchill. It was ugly, gross. Unpleasing mental pictures rose unbidden of a missionary's temptations. Never before had he felt such repulsion when the vicar displayed his characteristic bluntness or coarseness of speech. In the present connection—or rather as a transition from the subject that had started their conversation—such talk had been distressingly out of place. He went away feeling disgusted with Walsden.

He must do something. From one or another, he was always hearing further facts about the hardship of her life. The man made her work hard at teaching, he was greedy to make engagements for her at schools, he did not mind how far he sent her afield; and all her earnings went straight into his pocket. He doled out to her a few coins, grudgingly, for immediate needs.

It chanced that a dock labourer who had belonged to his Union and wanted to rejoin it stayed for a few nights at Denmark House, and from him Churchill heard still more. Vickers was notoriously unfaithful to her; he would take up with any trash, and leave her by herself for days and weeks at a time. At their home, the servant was a feeble old woman who let the mistress do most of the work. They used to have proper, vigorous young servants once; but he made it impossible for any decent girl to remain there long.

Churchill suddenly had an idea, and it seemed so excellent that he wondered it had not occurred to him before. Mrs. Verschoyle was the person to advise. If he could gain her friendship for Lilian Vickers, she would be the person to bring real aid.

But for the very first time Mrs. Verschoyle disappointed him. She talked kindly and finely; she was not unsympathetic, as Walsden had been, and yet her advice was almost an exact echo of his. She advised Edward Churchill to drop it.

She knew nothing of Mrs. Vickers personally; she had never even heard of her; and she showed a disinclination to make her acquaintance, pleading that she had already so many people who required perpetual attention, reminding him of the local calls upon her time. Of course she knew Vickers by reputation. She had never heard any good of him; but she sincerely trusted he was not quite so bad as Churchill thought.

"He is—every bit. Oh, surely one can do something for this innocent creature, who is daily suffering because of his wickedness!"

"Is she a believer?" asked Mrs. Verschoyle.

"Yes, a fervent believer."

"A good Catholic?"

"Yes."

"Then it ought not to be so difficult for her," and Mrs. Verschoyle's handsome face hardened a little. "She knows her duty. She must do it."

"How can I help her in doing her duty?"

"You can't help her more than I suppose you have already."

"But some *practical* step."

"Christian, you can't help her. If it is practical aid you think of, the only chance would be to get at the husband. Influence him, if you can."

XXV

Churchill determined to seek the friendship of Robert Vickers, and, if it were possible, lead him in the direction of better things.

An excuse for paying an initial call readily presented itself: he could talk to Mr. Vickers about his visitor, the dock labourer. Accordingly he set forth to carry this new idea into effect on the afternoon that followed his unsatisfactory discussion with Mrs. Verschoyle.

It was a long tram ride, far out, past Poplar Station; and then he had a little exploring walk to the north of the main road before he found the house. About this particular neighbourhood there had been of late considerable demolitions and reconstructions; the new streets seemed of a fair pattern; here and there narrow passages connected street to street, and there were many turnings that led one to short and abrupt no-thoroughfares. In one of these, approached both by a passage and a street, stood the residence of Mr. Vickers. On one side of it there was a hoarding that hid a patch of vacant ground, on the other side a high wall surmounted by broken glass. The house itself —a lowish building of two floors—looked as if it must originally have been occupied as a place of business and then converted to private use. Judged by East End standards, it appeared more than respectable, quite imposing in regard to its size, and dignified because of its isolated position. It had an ornamental knocker and an electric push-bell, and, fixed to the brickwork beside the door, there were brass plates that announced Mr. Vickers's association with the trade union and other societies.

It was Mrs. Vickers who came to open the door, and she flushed with surprise. Churchill himself was struck with sudden embarrassment. He had never before seen her without her hat, and he stood staring at her rather stupidly before he began to explain that he was a visitor for her husband. He was thinking, "This is what she is at home;"

and she seemed to him prettier, sweeter, more pathetically interesting, than under any aspect that had hitherto been familiar to him.

The voice of the master of the house, sounding from a little distance, roused him to give all his attention to the business in hand.

"Who the devil's that out there?" said the voice loudly.

"I am Edward Churchill—of St. Bede's," said the visitor, entering the small hall, and speaking sufficiently loudly to be sure that he was heard. "May I come in? Can you spare me a few minutes?"

"Oh, yes, of course."

Then Mrs. Vickers conducted the visitor through the open doorway to the right of the hall, down two steps, into an unexpectedly large room.

"Well, Mr. Churchill," said Vickers, shaking hands, and speaking politely enough; "I am sure I'm very glad to see you. Sit down. Lilian, move your rubbish, can't you?" and he pointed to a chair.

Lilian Vickers picked up a leather case and some school books that encumbered the seat of the chair, and carried them to a side table.

"Yes, glad to meet you," said Vickers, with the note of forced joviality in his voice. "I've heard enough about you—and your wonderful works. But, as they say in the plays, To what do I owe the honour?" and he gave his affected laugh.

Then Churchill spoke about the dock-labourer. Vickers listened, but soon broke in curtly.

"Anyhow, what is it? The fellow was kicked out because he defaulted in his subscriptions. Does he make that a quarrel?"

"No, but he wants to be reinstated."

"Can he clear off his arrears, and pay up—to date?"

"Yes, I think he will be able to do that."

"Then I don't see that there need be any difficulty. I suppose you mean to pay the money for him yourself."

"Yes. I believe him to be an honest, straightforward worker, who has simply had bad luck."

"Oh, they're all angels," said Vickers, with another laugh, "when they get among you black-coated gentlemen, and see you fingering your purse-strings—especially when it is such a long purse as yours."

"I am not by any means a rich man. All that is a tradition."

"Is it? They talk of you as if you were Crœsus—and I expect the beggars sponge on you unconscionably." And Vickers launched forth in a tirade very different from his platform utterances. He spoke with supreme contempt of the dense stupidity exhibited on all occasions by the working classes. He said that if you wanted to do anything for them, you must rule them, not pamper them. Soft heartedness caused more harm than good. You had to let them hear the crack of the whip; for they were always dogs ready to round on you, if you didn't keep them in order. "We have all found it out. We give our lives to their service; we fight their battles for them, we gain ground inch by inch, we reach the point when, if they would stand firm behind us, we could win nearly all we've been struggling for —and then, at the crucial moment, confound them, they'll go over to the enemy, leave you in the lurch, and chuck away the fruits of the victory for which you have been bleeding and sweating. And ingratitude! Personally, I don't look for it; so I don't whine about the absence of it, like George Radley and Vyvian Yates. But they're blackly ungrateful. You church-people won't believe it. You're always astonished when they bite the hand that feeds them;" and he laughed once more. "Look here, this is *entre nous, Masonic*—what Wemmick called his Walworth sentiments. I dare say I'm shocking you."

Churchill was merely glad that his host went on talking, however odiously. He was so interested by other matters. Everything in this room interested him absorbingly. It was her prison, the place to which he had sent her back, begging her to suffer there patiently, to do her duty, to comfort herself with thoughts of a deliverance that could come only with death.

It was really quite a large room, so large that unquestionably it must have been planned for an office or perhaps a store-place, such as small builders and plumbers require. The central table, and a dresser with plates, dishes, jugs, and a cupboard underneath it, gave evidence that the room was dining-room as well as drawing-room. And place of business too—for there was a safe let into the walls at a corner, there were piles of red leather account books, and an American desk covered with paper, stood beside the cottage piano. Vickers received the rank and file of his union here, extracted their continuous subscriptions, counted out rare sick allowances; and he would pose as a person who was content with a single living room, saying, "You see for yourselves. Nothing of the swell about *me*. This is what the missis and I have to put up with."

Churchill had the intuition of such a purpose, and thought that, but for it, the room would have been finer and more comfortable. The whitewashed ceiling and chimneypiece, the boarded floor and loose mats, the common coal-scuttle and fire-irons, were intended to indicate honest and unashamed poverty; but in less salient objects Churchill's practised eye detected a freedom of expenditure only possible to those who are comparatively affluent. The oil lamps were solid and of good design; they had cost big money. There was a leather arm-chair with book-rest and foot-rest that must have come from some luxurious West End shop. A few water-colours on a screen showed distinct merit and had not been presented to Vickers by the artists; moreover, a litter of illustrated weekly journals, monthly magazines, and quarterly reviews were proof of something amounting to extravagance.

Beyond all these significant details, Edward Churchill was interested by signs here and there of feminine occupation of the room. The flowers in pots before the two windows had been put there by Lilian Vickers. The cheap little books—reprints of the poets—belonged to her. On the top of the piano he saw her hat, her black gloves, and a purple-coloured neck-scarf. His eyes returned to them, and, moving on, rested on her herself. She stood near the piano, lingering—turning a sheet of music in her long white fingers, but listening and watching. That delicate pink flush had not yet gone from her cheeks, her lips were just open and she breathed quickly, as if still agitated by the surprise she had felt at seeing the unexpected visitor on the doorstep.

"You know, I'm staunch Church of England," said

Vickers impressively. "I don't believe in any form of socialism that leaves religion out of the programme. That's where I speedily broke away from Vyvian Yates. I saw that if you knock down Christianity, you've got to build up something better to take the place of it—and it's a deuced clever fellow who's going to try. No, in all my public career, I've never said a disrespectful word of the Church. No one who has heard me speak, year after year, can honestly pretend that I am destructive on that side, at any rate."

"I have only had the opportunity of hearing you speak once," said Churchill.

"When was that?"

"I went to your meeting at the Red Eagle tavern."

"Well done," cried Vickers cordially. "Sporting of you!"

It was the first time that he had been really cordial; but now he seemed to be genuinely gratified and his manner became expansive. "Yes," he repeated, "you acted like a sportsman. Old broad-toes—what's-his-name?—Walsden—hates me like the devil. I wish I'd known you were there. I'd have paid you a compliment for your liberality of mind. Have a cigar?"

"No, thank you."

Mr. Vickers had moved towards the dresser cupboard, and, passing his wife, he said something to her in an undertone. Immediately she picked up her hat, and went out of the room. Doubtless she had been ordered to go. Now that Mr. Vickers was beginning to feel rather pleased with his new acquaintance he thought that two are company and three are none.

"Have a whisky-and-soda?"

"No, I'm obliged to you, but I won't have anything, thank you."

"But you'll forgive me if I do. Talking's dry work—and I shall enjoy a chat with you, if you aren't in a hurry. As I dare say you've found out, it's a treat to meet a man of education and ideas in these parts. One's intellect goes rusty for the want of intercourse with one's own kind."

All this was just what Edward Churchill had desired might happen, and yet now it was almost intolerably unpleasant. The more amiable the man grew, the more Churchill disliked him. Everything concerning him was repellent; all that one had heard of him, all that one now saw of him, alike caused one to regret that one need ever again have anything to do with him. He was vulgar, conceited, innately brutal. The big yellowish teeth that showed beneath his red moustache, the russet tone of his badly-shaven jowl, the ill-tempered glitter that came into his eyes every time that he spoke forcibly or cynically as he had done a minute ago, his great shoulders, his swaggering gestures, and clumsy lolling attitudes—each of these things assisted in strengthening the instinct of repulsion.

But Churchill was struggling hard to beat down the instinct. He thought, "This is purely selfish, and must be ignored, then forgotten. Self should not dare to obtrude itself. What I am attempting is for her sake, not for my own; and if I am to succeed I must gain the man's confidence, establish an influence by more or less binding him to me. And if he is to like me, I must like him."

Soon, therefore, Churchill managed to control merely personal inclination to welcome every advance, however tactless or unconventionally familiar, to rejoice quite sincerely that matters so far had worked out easily. He responded to a mood made jovial by stimulants in which he did not share. He gravely and courteously smiled at commonplace, often-quoted jokes. By his whole manner, if not by any explicit statements, he offered Mr. Vickers his friendship.

And Vickers seemed to accept the offer freely, indeed with gratification. When it was suggested that he might possibly be able to drop in of an evening now and then and smoke his cigar or pipe at Denmark House, he said he would do so with much pleasure. The evening often hung heavy on his hands.

"But I say," he said, laughing, "you won't mind if I bring a flask of whisky in my pocket. I can't plead doctor's orders; but, much as I admire teetotalism as a theory, I've never been able to practise it for long at a time."

Churchill courteously assured him that the flask would not be necessary. He would be careful to provide some whisky.

And at this Vickers slapped him on the shoulder. "Yes, you're a sportsman. Live and let live, eh? You and I will hit it off together—I can see that. No disrespect—but you aren't by any means the cut-and-dried cleric. 'You wear your rue with a difference.' "

They were in the little hall now, and Churchill, as he glanced up the stairs, wondered if Lilian Vickers was within hearing. No doubt she was up there in a cold, fireless room, meekly waiting for her master's permission to creep down and again enjoy the warmth and comfort of his hearth.

"Good-bye, Churchill—or *au revoir.*" Vickers stood on the threshold, calling after him cheerily. "Turn to your left. That passage to your right would take you into *my* sheepfold—the streets where my lambs are to be found—and you might lose your way. By-by."

Churchill, looking back just before he turned the corner, directed his eyes not at Vickers and the front door but at the upper floor. He fancied, but was not sure, that he saw Lilian at one of the windows.

XXVI

THE first evening that Vickers came to Denmark House he stayed about three hours, and they seemed to Churchill three years. They nearly wore out his patience.

Vickers, perhaps a little because of a mistaken idea of politeness and more because of a stupid curiosity about facts which in no way concerned him, began by behaving as if he had been a reporter and Churchill a person to be conscientiously interviewed for the newspapers. During one of those three hours he scarcely for a moment desisted from asking questions.

"I see you burn a wood fire. Where do you get your wood?"

Churchill told him that he had got it from a well-known charitable organisation.

"What do they make you give for it?"

Churchill told him.

"Thirty per cent. above market price. Oh, I know Curtice's scheme inside out—to help the unemployed—pinch of winter—and all that. It's a mistake. But you believe in this direct kind of assistance?"

"Yes, to a certain extent."

"You aren't afraid of pauperising them?"

"No. Providence has done that for them already."

"Now look here, your wood was brought by two chaps—two chaps, weren't there?"

"Yes."

"And you paid 'em what they asked; you gave 'em the full amount written down on the Society's invoice, and perhaps a little something for themselves over and above? Isn't that so?"

"Yes."

"But they didn't go away smiling and pleased. No, they began to whine and cadge. I put it to you, didn't they ask for more?"

"Er—yes, I don't remember whether they exactly asked; but I did give them something else."

"Ha, ha," and Vickers laughed, truculently triumphant. "*I* know my gentleman. What did you give them?"

Churchill confessed that, as the poor fellows were unquestionably underclad, standing in the February blast, themselves hot and exhausted—two weaklings who had pushed the laden barrow for miles—he gave them food and a couple of old suits of clothes.

"Suits of clothes! By Jupiter—that was doing them proud. Your own clothes?"

"No—some things I had bought."

"But you don't buy old clothes, do you?"

"Yes, I do sometimes," and Churchill explained that he kept a wardrobe modestly stocked against such emergencies.

"No wonder they say you're a Crœsus! But I think you mentioned the other day that the prevailing idea was erroneous?"

"Yes, altogether so."

"But you have done a lot here in the way of outlay, haven't you?"

"I have put my drop into the ocean."

"This house belongs to you?"

"Yes, it does at the present moment."

"What, are you leaving? Going to part with the house?"

"No. But I am making it over to trustees for the parish."

"Now there I think you're wrong. You'd much better remain cock of your own castle. Once it's theirs, you'll find they won't be really grateful. You hand them the title deeds, they hand you an illuminated address—and 'Thank you, Mr. Churchill, but now please remember that we are the masters, and not you.'"

"I have great confidence in our vicar. He would never treat me shabbily."

Then Mr. Vickers continued his examination until he had satisfied himself as to all the principal items of Churchill's expenditure at St. Bede's. He approved of the good intentions displayed, but was more than doubtful as to ultimate results. Then he harangued in a gassy, inconsecutive style about what he would have done himself had he been Churchill and with Churchill's funds at his disposal. This general address was followed by a noisily enthusiastic sketch of the great Labor Party now slowly forming itself. Then he wandered about the room, picked up and swung an Indian club, assuring Churchill that once upon a time he had been "rather useful" in the athletic line. And then he settled down in one of the red-cushioned wicker chairs, and devoted himself to the whisky bottle and siphon of soda on the table at his elbow.

The whisky made him mellow, confidential, terrible; and Churchill, suffering for two more hours, thought off and on of the creature's wife, and only from these thoughts derived courage and patience to support the ordeal.

Lilian had sat in that very chair, and every detail of the picture she had made could be vividly recalled—her thoughtful eyes looking at him appealingly, her hands in the well-worn black gloves, the slight droop of her neck—her gracefulness, her gentleness, the spiritual charm of her fragile beauty. What a contrast to the picture before him now—the gross, self-indulgent lout who possessed but did not value her! Churchill endeavoured not to study so attentively the fat lobes of those ears, the swollen and yet ceasing flesh of the chin—or the insolent redness and stubbiness of the moustache, the protruded lips and the dog-like teeth that were rolling and chewing the oily brown stump of a cigar. He must forget himself. He must think only of her—of her; of the sweet, refined, unhappy woman that this brute, this great sweltering hog, had the inalienable right to fondle and caress.

After a few days Vickers came again, and then again. He evidently liked coming; he made himself more and more at home; and he was utterly odious: familiar, impudent, even overbearing, everything beastly. He pounced upon favourite old books of Churchill's, twirled their leaves, and tossed them away contemptuously; he talked philosophy; chattered of classical literature, mispronouncing his silly little scraps of Latin and Greek; but believed that he was "showing off" successfully. He said, as indeed was obvious, that he was not "a 'Varsity man."

"Is it any good? I often ask myself the question—Have I missed anything?" And he gave his platform laugh. "Between you and me and the post, I don't think so."

Churchill hated him. It was wrong, it was unchristian, it was inevitable. But he had begun a delicate, difficult task, and he intended to go through with it to the best of his ability. On this third evening he really set to work. He tackled Vickers about the evils of drink, opening his attack on the broadest possible lines.

"Oh, yes," said Vickers, "I myself used to drink too much —sometimes."

"You do still, don't you—sometimes?"

Vickers stared. Then he said, "Yes, I do," and gave one of his hateful tirades—composed of hypocrisy, vulgarity, bravado, mock-heroics—very difficult to listen to patiently and answer gently. "I make no secret," he said in conclusion. "I'm a man—all through—with a man's faults. I belong to the Church—only I never set up for being one of its saints. But I came for a smoke and chat—not for a sermon."

"Sit down. Fill your pipe again. I am not trying to preach."

"That's all right," said Vickers, after a moment or two. "No, you're a man yourself. You can understand. We can't all be perfect. You know, some of these curates—well, I think they must have had an operation performed to keep them mild and meek for the rest of their lives;" and he spat. "Fellows like that bleating round a parish don't do any good. You're not that sort;" and he nodded his head towards the Indian clubs, and the little college trophies. "We're both of us men. We can understand each other."

"Then as between men, may I ask a question?"

"Fire ahead."

"Can't you be kinder to your wife?"

Vickers sprang from the chair, his eyes glittering, and his cheeks puffed out in anger.

"Don't go. Sit down—smoke your pipe. I speak in friendliness. I want to be your friend."

But Vickers blustered for a while. He said he could not allow any one to come between him and his wife. She was the best of wives; and he was a good husband—all that a man should be.

Presently, however, he became mollified, resumed his seat, and, helping himself to more whisky, spoke sentimentally, "Poor little Lil! I beg you not to get it into your head that I'm not fond of her. Bless her heart, of course I am. Dear little Lil. She's had a roughish time of it—but *that's* not my fault. She knows I'm always ready to work till I burst."

He grew maudlin on the subject later, punishing the whisky, emptying the bottle.

"Churchill, do you admire her? Don't mind saying No. Of course I like people to admire her, but I can't jump down their throats if they don't. *I* still see her as she was—and she's nothing to what she was. She had more flesh on her—bright complexion—just a little country maid." And he went on about her charms with a brutal sort of relish—as of a man who has had a splendid banquet and is grateful, who looks back on his feast and is now content with plain fare. "She's all the world to me still—I swear it. Never unfaithful to her in my thoughts—but a man. When tempted—well! I've told you fairly, I'm not a saint."

He did not appear again for a week, and then his manner showed a very perceptible change. He was more on his guard; the joviality was altogether forced; and in repose his face had a surly aspect. He did not stay long, and when going he spoke abruptly, and with something of that blustering tone that he had employed once before.

"You like straight talk, Churchill. If you've got anything to say, you say it. I'll take the same liberty; for there's something I wish to know."

"What is it you wish to know?"

"Are you trying to draw my wife away from me?"

"No. I am trying to draw your wife back to you. You are driving her away yourself."

"Has she been doing confessional to you?"

"No. I have given her advice. Do you object to her coming here?"

"No. Why should I? I've nothing to be ashamed of. No. Go on. I didn't mean anything by that. You gave her advice?"

"I spoke to her of a wife's duty—she knew it. But duty is not all on one side, so I have reminded you of a husband's duty."

"But was this a put-up job between you?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, did she turn you loose at me—as advocate of women's rights in general and hers in particular?"

"No, it was my own initiative. She knew nothing about it."

"She knows now."

"Being aware that you and I were seeing each other, she would guess that I might speak of such things. Vickers, I thought you would take it from me in a friendly spirit. I thought I could not do harm—because your treatment of her is common talk."

"Is it?" And Vickers cursed all busybodies and slanderers. "If I catch any one who has been cackling slander about me I'll make him sorry he didn't think twice before he began that game." Then he pulled himself together and vaguely indicated an apology for violent language in the presence of a clergyman. "You can make allowances—naturally I felt strongly. Anyhow, you've given me a direct answer. There was no little plot hatched between you for clerical interference. All right, Churchill. I believe you. You're straight enough. But *something* is upsetting her. She's always fretful and complaining;" and he continued grumblingly. "What does she want? No one can say I don't work. I can't coin money, and give her a carriage and a pair of her own instead of the omnibus."

"No, you can't do that! but there are other things you could do." And Churchill spoke with emotion of the sanctity of marriage and the meaning of its vows. It was not enough to love a wife, if one insulted her by occasional preferences for chance female companions. Wives wanted more than mere food and shelter. Women's nature demanded and could not safely be deprived of kindness, tenderness, sympathy.

"Yes," said Vickers, with a very unmirthful laugh; "but you're a bachelor. I don't deny a word that you've said about married life. I merely remark you've never tried it yourself."

"No, but I think that the conditions under which you have tried it have not been difficult."

Vickers came only once again, and then it was but to say that his engagements would not permit him to stop for more than five minutes. During the five minutes they talked on indifferent topics; and Churchill had the feeling that this last visit was made from motives of politeness or policy. Vickers desired to show that their recent intimate conversations had not spoilt the progress of a ripening friendship. He had taken Churchill's domestic hints in a jolly spirit; he had not been offended; and not a drop of bad blood was left between them.

Next day or the day after Churchill received a brief note from Lilian Vickers, in which she thanked him for the extraordinarily kind effort that he had been making on her behalf. She said that she would never forget his kindness, but as she added no expressions of hopefulness as to the future, he understood that the whole attempt had been a failure.

Except in St. Bede's church he did not see her again for some time. He was touched by the fact that she came there on nearly every occasion that he was to preach; for from Mrs. Walsden he learned how, in spite of all difficulties, she endeavoured not to miss a single one of his sermons. As he went into the pulpit he thought of her courage, endurance, and abiding sadness; and he often modified what he had intended to say, abandoned the plan of his notes, preached as it were especially to her, trying to send her a plain message of comfort, even though it should be enigmatical to all others.

It had become a haunting idea with him that people's faith needed constant reinforcement, lest of a sudden it should desert them. Nowadays, when Philbrick and other of Walsden's humble converts asked their startingly naive questions on points of belief, he took immense trouble in framing his answers. He would seek out such questioners again, and strive further to fortify them. "When you spoke to me yesterday, did my reply make everything clear to you? If not, don't hesitate to ask me other questions. You know, we are not called upon always to understand. We must believe. But the belief itself is so easy to explain. It is entirely my fault, if I left any doubt in your mind." He felt that, with the staunchest of them, there was always the terrible danger of losing heart when trouble or sorrow forced them to a recognition of the world-wide incongruity between purposeless pain and beneficent design. This was the growing fear that he felt in regard to everybody, but it centralised itself and was strongest when he brooded on the case of Lilian Vickers.

He would have liked to be with her every day, stimulating her faith from hour to hour, clothing her in a ghostly armour that nothing material could ever pierce. But since she had ceased to come to him for help, he could scarcely go unasked to offer it.

He hoped that perhaps, after all, he had influenced her jailer, and that life within the prison walls was not so unendurable as of old.

It was a hope that he could not long enjoy.

At dusk one evening towards the end of March when he returned to Denmark House, Mrs. Clough told him that a lady was waiting for him upstairs. He guessed at once who it was that he would find in the twilight of the back room. They sat together while the darkness deepened round them; and, sobbing and wringing her hands, she told him the brutal truth that till now she had kept back. The man knocked her about. Quite soon after marriage she had felt the weight of his hand. He had fits of semi-drunken fury during which she was never safe from blows. After such outrages he seemed sorry, ashamed of himself, and promised that they should never be repeated. But he broke all promises. The vile ill-usage recommenced; it happened again and again; it had happened to-day, and she could not go on supporting it.

And to Edward Churchill it was as if for the first time in his existence he had heard of a husband beating a wife, as if the outrage had never been committed before in the whole history of human kind. He blazed with anger, he turned faint with disgust; he throbbed and ached and trembled.

He wanted to go straight to the man, tell him he had learnt the full extent of his villainy, and dare him ever to touch her again; but he knew really that this was impossible, even before she herself said so. Any further direct interference on his part would injure her and not benefit her.

Then, still sobbing, she told him once more that she had reached the end of her strength. She must free herself from this life of torment. She had no money, she could get no money; so an action for divorce was out of the question. But she meant to divorce herself by running away, by hiding in some remote part of England where she could live under another name, work for daily bread, perhaps obtain something that approached to happiness—and she wanted Churchill to tell her that as a Christian woman she was justified in thus breaking the marriage bond.

Edward Churchill fell silent. His heart was beating fast, the blood throbbed in the veins of his forehead, his whole head seemed on fire. What was he to say? He got up and walked about the room, turning on the electric light at each switch that he passed.

"I am thinking," he said, without looking at her. "I am endeavouring to think."

Would she not be justified? Slowly he recovered self-composure. Mechanically his brain was working in its accustomed manner; the thoughts, like obedient streams, flowed along the deep channels that habit had formed for them; the storm of emotion, fierce as it was, could not smash the dykes and make a wild, ungoverned flood where for so many years all had been peaceful order.

He looked at her now. The light shone brightly on her tear-stained face, her drooping arms, and her limp hands. Darkness and light—we must not fear the darkness; we must turn our eyes to the light. And looking at her and thinking of her his pity was like physical fatigue. It made him feel numb, dull, like a man who has overtired himself and imperatively needs rest. There was none of that contentment after extreme effort experienced by him when he pitied and laboured for those boys in the boat. But he now knew what he ought to say to her, what he must necessarily say to her, if he would keep true to his character as a priest.

He said it dully, yet with convincing firmness. As a Christian she must bear her cross. Divorce courts possessed no real power to set her free; those whom God has joined together no man can sunder. Marriage is a sacrament, and its effective term is till death. In that sacrament all is promised, and all must be given. Nor may we fly and hide from pain that God has ordained we are patiently to bear. He who could have evaded the slightest touch of pain accepted its bitterest pangs. That was a lesson, an example, and a promise.

He told her that earthly grief and earthly joy are alike so small and trivial that soon they are utterly forgotten; the greatness, the wonder, the ineffable bliss that are surely coming should make the happiest life, even in the spending of it, seem merely a delay or hindrance, and the cruellest, longest life less dreadful than a rapid, troubled dream.

"So be brave, my sister," and he held his hand above her head. "Follow in Christ's footsteps, and suffer for His sake."

"I'll try," she said at last. "Yes, I'll go on trying;" and meekly and sadly she went away.

He did not close his eyes throughout the night. Thoughts of Lilian Vickers made a long, waking nightmare of the hours. He had done nothing for her. In sight of such tears as would melt a heart of stone, he had been impotently didactic, preaching instead of protecting, thrilling with indignation and then sending her back to blows.

On the following afternoon he went to St. Ursula's rectory, determined to enlist Mrs. Verschoyle's sympathy, and confident that now there would no longer be any difficulty in doing so.

Mrs. Verschoyle was in the garden behind the house, busy with strings and feathers that she was setting up across a bed of crocuses to guard them from the ravages of sparrows or cats. She showed Churchill the first purple and white blossoms, began to talk about the lilac bushes which already had green buds, and asked how the famous plane tree was looking after all the trials of winter. But Churchill could talk of nothing except Lilian Vickers. "You know," he said eagerly, "that poor woman—Mrs. Vickers. I have more to tell you. I want to tell you much more."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Verschoyle, without the least enthusiasm. "Then we had better go indoors;" and after a regretful glance at the strings and feathers, she led the way back to the house and into her pretty drawing-room.

Here, Edward Churchill walked to and fro, waved his arms, stood before her, sat on the sofa by her side, jumped up and sat down again, while he excitedly spoke of the poor victim who now occupied all his mind. What was to be done for her? He fully explained his fear lest the abominable injustice of fate should eventually shake her faith; and Mrs. Verschoyle sat quite still on the sofa, listening to his words, watching his face, and once or twice, although he did not notice it, looking quite distinctly bored.

But when he suggested that he should bring Mrs. Vickers to the rectory, and as it were solemnly place her in charge of the rector's wife, all signs of *ennui* immediately disappeared. She spoke kindly, but in a brisk businesslike tone, and gave Churchill at least six excellently valid reasons why his suggestion was one that could not be adopted. She was thoroughly interested at last, and indeed from now to the end of the interview her interest was always increasing. She watched Churchill far more closely than before, and every minute the tone of her voice became kinder and the expression of her face more meditative.

"This is all very difficult, Christian," she said, gently and soothingly. "What sort of a woman is she—I mean in her general life?"

"She is as good as gold—patient and sweet."

"Yes. What aged woman?"

"I don't know. But very young. I should think about twenty-two—or twenty-three."

"So young as that! Is she pretty?"

"I think her very pretty—but I don't know if everybody would think her so. She's extraordinarily graceful—and her voice is quite beautiful. That I'm sure any one would say."

"Describe her so that I can imagine what she is like. Tall?"

"Yes, fairly tall."

"Dark?"

"No." And assuring Mrs. Verschoyle that his word-picture would give but the feeblest, vaguest ideas, he attemped a description. "She's the sort of person you don't notice much at first, but who quickly grows on you. All I noticed—at the very first—was her voice. She is slender and pale—scarcely any colour in her face; her nose is rather large, but quite straight and thin; I suppose you would call her eyes grey—they're nothing, but they are full of thought.

Yes, I forgot that. It was the second thing I noticed—the *thoughtfulness* of her eyes."

Mrs. Verschoyle smiled. "I wonder what you mean by thoughtful eyes. Artists say there's no expression in the eyes themselves."

"I don't believe it. Anyhow, I mean the effect produced. When she looks at one, one feels the thought behind the eyes, and if one does not read it, one knows that it is good and pure."

"Yes," said Mrs. Verschoyle quietly, "all that you say helps me to imagine her—and it makes me very sorry for her. Only"—and she hesitated—"only, Christian, you have done all you can for her. You cannot do any more."

"I have done nothing. And, at least, can't *you* do anything?"

"No, really and truly, I can't do anything either."

"You'll disappoint me grievously if you will not even try."

"Christian"—she had got up from the sofa, and she put her hand upon his arm—"you mustn't think me wanting in proper feeling. Believe me, I am *very* sorry for her. But all this that seems so monstrous to you is the fate of thousands and thousands of women——" and she opened her arms in a wide, comprehensive gesture. "At this moment—all round us—to north, east, south, and west—women are weeping because men are cruel."

XXVII

THE first week of April brought a little warmth and sunshine, but Edward Churchill could take no personal pleasure in the signs of advancing spring. For the sake of others he was glad that the hard time had passed, but for himself nothing mattered. He felt listless, wretched, with so strange a decrease of his natural energy that the temptation to shirk the full round of each day's work became almost irresistible.

Then a chance put him into contact with Lilian Vickers again, and the slight relief of mind that he thereby obtained served immediately to restore his confidence and power. There had been no recurrence of that unspeakable wickedness, and she spoke with hope of the future. She was showing a splendid courage; she had read, and benefited by reading, some books he had sent her; she meant to follow the narrow, difficult path that eventually must lead upwards to the sunlit heights. Moreover, she was now enjoying respites from the possibility of persecution. Her husband was away on a political campaign, a tour of oratory in the north of England; and when he came back he would go away again to begin a similar tour in the south. He would be much away from home until the middle of June.

Chance, the unaided hazard of the streets, gave Edward Churchill this long, pleasant, reassuring talk with her; but after that lucky encounter he began to meet her designedly. He asked for no appointment, and he did not invite her to Denmark House. He knew now, more or less exactly, the usual programme of her week's labours; so that in imagination he could trace her movements about the labyrinth, thinking of her at particular hours as she passed along a street miles and miles away, or drew nearer to him in a swiftly-gliding tram. Eleven o'clock—she was going to those grocery stores at Poplar to give the grocer's little girls their music lesson. Twelve-thirty—she was on her way to Shoreditch for a lesson in French. Early in the afternoon on three days a week the tram brought her right through St.

Bede's and half a mile westwards, for two hours at a Jewish school close by the Commercial Road. He could find her easily on those days—either going or returning.

One bright afternoon—the brightest that as yet had come—he was standing on the pavement when she got out of her tram, and he walked with her round the corner and for the two or three hundred yards that still separated her from the Jewish school. He wished that the distance had been greater so that the walk might have lasted longer, and at the school door he offered to come back after her two hours' work and escort her all the way home. But this offer she refused; she could not think of so troubling him, and quite unnecessarily.

"I should like to, if you would let me," he said simply.

"Oh, no," she said, "you're very kind; but really I couldn't let you waste your time. I know very well how busy you always are."

"I don't think I have anything particular to do to-day," he said, rather vaguely. "And it's so fine."

"Yes, isn't it? But I am not quite sure whether I shall go home when I leave here. There's a call that perhaps I ought to make—yes," and she looked at him. "But thank you very much for thinking of it. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

He returned to Denmark House, and sat down to read. His idea of taking leisure for the purpose of going out eastward with her had driven away all inclination to occupy the afternoon in an ordinary manner. It had given him that peculiar, unsettling, holiday feeling which is apt to attack the steadiest workers when once they have decided on an interruption of work. After an hour he found it impossible even to read.

He looked at his watch, and thought, "In thirty-five minutes she will have finished with that class." A little later he thought, "She will soon leave the building; but if I started now there would be still just time. Yes, if I went now I should see her."

He snatched his hat, ran downstairs, and hurried through the streets.

All the Jewish children were trooping out of the school doors; and she, when she came, looked neither to the right nor to the left. He fancied that she walked slowly, that her whole aspect suggested weariness, and he saw that her face was white and grave and sad. But when he stepped forward and spoke to her she was pleased that he had come back. One could not doubt it. She showed that little flush of surprise, fading again directly, and then her face was full of quiet pleasure and contentment.

They went away together in the tram, and when they alighted near her home she consented to go for a ride with him outside an omnibus—simply and solely for the treat of remaining out in the pleasant air. They went as far as the omnibus would take them, then straight back on another omnibus; and all the way to and fro they were talking merely of the things they passed—the gradient of the bridge across the water, the excavations for the new tunnel, the steamships in the East India Docks—but rejoicing because of this rest in the midst of motion, forgetting trouble and care, feeling as unconstrained and satisfied in each other's company as though they were life-long friends, cousins who had shared the same nursery, or a brother and sister come together after many years.

The sun was down, but the sky still lit with golden flame, when he left her at the door with those ugly brass plates that bore her husband's name. The house looked dark and cold after the door had closed upon her; a sinister, ominous dwelling, made more prison-like by the blank dreariness of the wooden hoarding on one side and the high brick wall on the other.

But Churchill walked away briskly, his mind at peace, indeed with cheerful, hopeful thoughts in it. He had loved his little outing, and was well satisfied now with the whole afternoon.

He met her, then, as often as he could manage to do so. And the days he saw her were full, and all other days were empty.

He knew her engagements on ordinary days, but he had never inquired if she worked at all at her teaching on Saturday afternoons. He supposed not: she would probably remain at home, sewing, making her cloth jackets and serge skirts, putting new flowers on an old hat, or perhaps even scrubbing and cleaning the house. He thought of this one

Saturday as he strolled along the main thoroughfare after his frugal mid-day meal.

The week-end festival was beginning; the barrows and stalls had taken up their positions, all wagons and carts had disappeared, only the crowded trams and buses rolled by in a narrowed fair-way, and the broad pavements were thronged from the kerb to the shop fronts. He thought, "Suppose she happened to come this way." In imagination he could instantaneously see her. He would recognise her at a considerable distance—just somebody taller than other people, somebody *different;* then, as she threaded her way through the crowd, the strikingly individual characteristics would become evident—her slimness, the neat costume, that pretty, soft, flowing neck-scarf; and then his eyes would be charmed and his tender pity stirred by the full close vision of her herself. And at that final moment, no matter how dense the crowd, she would seem to be walking or standing quite alone, a creature from another world crowned with a spiritual loveliness that is not, that cannot be, describable in common terms.

But she did not come. No happy unexpected chance had set her footsteps westwards. She was sitting behind closed doors in that far-off house. Then, strong and definite, came the wish to go right out there at once to see her. Yes, why not? That was what he would do. But then he had a sudden revulsion of mind, so that within a moment of time the wish was completely frustrated, if not destroyed. Utterly impossible. What would she say of such an extraordinary proceeding? What would she *think?*

He walked on in the same direction—eastwards, meaning to turn off presently to the river, or perhaps go as far as St. Ursula's rectory and call upon Mrs. Verschoyle. She had written reproaching him for recent neglect and begging him to come. He might look in on her now. But then he understood that he could not be bothered to do it. He still felt a slight bitterness or indignation against Mrs. Verschoyle. He had been forced to readjust his established estimates both of her nature and her intelligence. She was so good—but with such limitations. If she had comprehended the essential, the pressing needs of the case, she would have made friends with Lilian Vickers; and he might now have been going to meet

Lilian Vickers at the rectory, quite naturally. Under those conditions Lilian could not have thought it odd.

Then he had another revulsion of mind. She would never think such nonsense, anywhere or at any time. If he went to see her now, it would seem to her perfectly natural. He quickened his pace, crossed the road, and jumped upon the foot-board of a moving tram.

It being Saturday afternoon, those new streets were full of people, women talking in groups, children playing, and men in shirt-sleeves on the doorsteps—among them, no doubt, many members of Vickers's union; but when Churchill went through the little passage it was like passing into a small backwater of life, and not a soul any longer observed his movements. Yet he had a queer and of course baseless fancy that he was still being watched, that there were people in hiding, waiting to see what he would do, peeping through chinks of the wooden hoarding or furtively peering over the brick wall. Not a gleam of sunlight fell upon the house itself; the front was all in shadow; and it looked dark, wicked, mysterious. He hesitated; then went to the door, rang gently, and knocked lightly.

No one came to the door. Dead silence. His heart sank. She was not at home. He rang again and again, as loudly as he could, and presently he believed that he heard sounds within. If so, they were sounds made by that old crone of a servant; and he battered with the knocker as though he wanted to smash the door. At last the old woman opened the door, and looked out suspiciously until she saw his black clothes and Roman collar.

"Er—is Mr. Vickers in?"

"No."

"Nor Mrs. Vickers?"

"No—she went out ten minutes ago."

"Do you know where she has gone? Or when she is coming back?" And he was aware that he flushed while he spoke.

"You might find her at the Poplar Institoot," said the old woman. "She does go there Saturdays, and she had her leather case along with her." And then the old woman, becoming interested and officious, made many suggestions.

"If you want to find her particular, try the Institoot first. If she isn't there, go on to the Carnegie Free Library. She fetches her books there. Or, stop a minute, she might be at Price's Stores. If not, you may be sure, she's gone on the tram, and I couldn't tell you where she mightn't be. Church, p'raps. She'll go right off to St. Bede's sometimes for the church services."

He went away feeling guilty. He hardly knew why, but he knew that he was ashamed of himself. And it was a sensation that he must get rid of. He said to himself, "I am glad she was not there; and I certainly will not follow her to the Institute or the Library. I must go straight home and think about all this."

But once more there came that violent revulsion of thought. It was like an interference by an external force, an arrest, a shock, and a reversal: as though his brain had been a machine hard at work as usual, until with foolish abruptness its driving power was shut off, its gear altered, and the power turned on again—to send every wheel and band spinning in an opposite direction. What a moment ago he had considered advisable he now felt to be altogether wrong.

It seemed that something of great seriousness was happening, so far as he was concerned; and that he must deal with himself sternly and boldly, and not timorously. He thought, "The sooner I find her the better. Directly I am with her, it will all be over. Just the sight of her will conquer the sentimental self-conscious nonsense. Whereas if I go and hide and think, everything will begin again. This won't bear thinking over; the less I think about it the better."

He went fast from place to place, thinking no more, only knowing that he wanted to find her, and feeling sick with disappointment when he could not do so. She had been at the Institute, but was gone. At the Library he was advised to go to a school in Limehouse. At Limehouse they sent him back to Poplar. He spent the afternoon in a fruitless pursuit.

When he fell asleep that night he dreamed of her. The dream was a reflection of the afternoon's pursuit. He was always near her, yet always prevented by vague obstacles from getting quite close to her; he yearned and strove, pouring out waves of will power to sweep away each indefinite barrier of difficulty; and at last, as rarely happens in such dreams of frustrated effort, he came up with her, took her hand in his; and side by side they walked on, floated on, swam through space, in ethereal joy. The contact seemed to spiritualise his whole frame; it was a taste of ecstatic, heavenly, pure delight; and then he woke.

And he went to sleep longing to dream again.

XXVIII

In the morning he felt tired and heavy, and his first clear thought was, "Then this is sin."

"Sin has come into my life, and the real battle now begins." Happily, it would be a battle unshared by her. The battlefield was one man's mind. And he made his vows: to fight and conquer. He did not pray, did not even think of praying; but he summoned all his brain power. Let self conquer self.

He made plans for the immediate future. He must avoid her, of course. He must occupy his mind continuously; for, as he had proved, bodily fatigue was not enough.

Meditating on the events of the last year, his many distressful hours, his great sadness or depression of spirit, he believed that he could trace a steadily weakening process, and also that he could recognise various warnings or premonitions of a danger that every day had drawn a little nearer. Looking back thus, he thought, "Yes, that sense of lessened sunshine, the twilight at high noon, the darkness that I seemed to fear, was the shadow of approaching sin."

Then, before the day was over, he thought, But why is it sin? I have done nothing. I am not going to do anything. It is not even a temptation. Only she could tempt me, and she will never even know. It is just a thought.

"But it is an evil thought. She is another man's wife. Therefore I may not think of her."

Yet his thoughts of her hitherto had been so entirely innocent. He had admired her at first just as he had admired Mrs. Verschoyle—only very much less; he had been sorry for her as he would have been sorry for anybody else similarly situated; when he learned the full extent of her unhappiness he had felt immense pity for her. Why not? But the pity had been perhaps abnormal—too violent, too incessant, too overwhelmingly strong. He liked being with her. He forgot his own sadness when sitting by her side, watching her face, listening to her voice; and he forgot her sadness also.

He did not trifle with the truth. He meant to fight, and he wanted to know what he was fighting; he knew he was going to suffer, and he wanted to know how much. Retrospectively, he could see that the sentimental interest, the silliness and softness had manifested themselves a long way back in the progress of this episode; but on Lilian's side there had been nothing whatever of the sort. Thinking herself weak and believing him strong, she had leaned upon him for support. And so far he had not failed her: she would never guess that he was weaker than water. No harm had come to her, and as yet he could not be permanently injured. It would be quite absurd to suppose so.

Constitutionally and temperamentally, he was a man over whom women—in this relation—had never exercised any great power. In his youth there had been none of those phases of what is called calf-love to foretell the later advent of real passion. No impure desires had ever assailed him. He had passed from youth into manhood clean and undisturbed. And the naturally noble dreams that stimulate the best of men to seek a life-long comrade with a pretty face and charming form had also been most strangely absent. He did not desire women's company, he did not like it; their glowing beauty left him cold, their instinctive search for wooing glance in all male eyes repelled him. He had neither desired a wife, nor even missed a sister. In all the scheme of his existence there had been only one woman, his mother.

It was not, therefore, likely now that all should change with him. But while he reasoned thus calmly, reason itself seemed to answer. The voice of the logic he had evoked to console him inexorably threatened him. It said: You merely renounced what you had never possessed; you looked with contempt at what you couldn't comprehend; you denied the existence of the highest joy on earth because you knew nothing about anything except heaven.

Then he ceased to argue with himself, or hunt for causes, or belittle their effects. He was desperately, appallingly fond of this woman. There was the truth, and the more sternly he faced it the more tremendous it became; and his thoughts, rapidly expanding, grew so big that no words were big enough for their adequate expression. It seemed to him that no living man since the world began had so loved a woman. It seemed to him that all the love that he had felt throughout his life, though apparently dissipated, wasted, gone, was in truth stored like energy; that, slowly collected again, however widely dispersed, it was ready now to be released; that his love of his mother and his love of the whole of mankind and his love of the Creator of mankind were pouring out of him in the concentrated, overwhelming stream that made up his love for Lilian.

That was the truth. A terrible danger—and yet not really a danger, because she remained untouched. The danger would not be real, unless some little stream of love, a rivulet compared with his, began to flow from her.

Then came the thought that she did care for him—unconsciously perhaps. If she had been Miss Vickers instead of Mrs. Vickers, her manner towards him would have proved what people call inclination, and all the rest would have followed naturally. He could not in such circumstances have doubted the feelings that she entertained. Nor did he doubt now. With a thrill of pleasure that was more poignantly distressing than pain, he recognised this other aspect of the truth.

And he thought, "Why am I so played with? This torment is too ingenious—it is like an imagination of a devil, not like a test by which a beneficent Power tries faithful servants. And why go on testing me? I have already passed through the furnace, I have been put to many proofs, I have borne much. Besides, if she is to be involved—if she feels for me one millionth part of what I feel for her—where is the sense or justice, however inscrutably it is said to work? Why should *she* be tortured? Is not the hell of her married life enough?"

And now at last he had a full understanding of the intolerable test. He said to himself: "I have been tricked into loving her. I was made to believe her free, and I gave her my heart in innocence. She is the only woman on earth I have wanted, or could want. If she might have been my wife, I should have come close to heaven. For heaven and earth would have been one."

XXIX

He went on with his work.

As much as possible he kept in the society of Walsden, following him about, clinging to him, as though hoping that safety could be found in the atmosphere of simple faith, dogged perseverance, and almost brutal common-sense that habitually surrounded the honest vicar wherever he chanced to be at the moment. The vicar disapproved of the manner in which his favourite curate was spending money at this time; but he allowed himself to be overborne, and the various business arrangements relating to the outlay made it necessary that the two men should be much together.

The transfer of Denmark House had been completed; it now belonged to the parish of St. Bede's, and Churchill was a guest where he had been host—an honoured visitor who would never be disturbed, and who earned his welcome by saving the salary of a superintendent. But a hostel without funds to keep it going is but half a gift, so he poured funds into the strong-box of the trustees. Then, too, he had a feverish anxiety to render the future of several humble dependents quite secure. For instance, old Philbrick. He had made it a condition of the trust that the poor old chap was to be treated as a permanent inmate; but, having hitherto allowed him a small pension, he now capitalised the pension. The day should not come for Philbrick when he searched his pockets and found no coins to buy tobacco or a new pipe. And so it was with others. Those who had confidently relied on Mr. Churchill must not be at the mercy of fresh guardians, however good and kind. Churchill felt that all these matters must be attended to without a moment's delay. He used to think, "I can't rest until I am sure that these people are safe, whatever happens to me."

Struggling to find some effectual means of occupying his mind during the long hours when the day's work was done, and yet, in spite of fatigue, it was useless to think of sleep, he hit upon the idea of again attempting some kind of literary composition. Since his Oxford days he had made no such attempt. Except in writing sermons his pen had been idle. Now it should get some more eager, hurried practice.

He started with notes for a novel, and for two or three evenings the entirely unaccustomed task absorbed him. He was making a framework, to be filled in at some subsequent period. His fable was the life-history of a young man who rubbed along in a very comfortable humdrum fashion until circumstances led to his falling in love with a charming and accomplished young lady. For his opening or exposition he jotted down disjointed scenes, character sketches, descriptions, and much dialogue that consisted chiefly of ethical arguments; and then he dashed ahead, to get at the love interest. But with his first sentence about this interest, it was as though he had set himself on fire.

All the thoughts that he had regarded as cold, inert refuse burst into vigorous flame; all the words that he had never spoken crackled explosively at the point of his pen. This form of literary exercise would not do. He bundled the novel notes together, put them away in a drawer, and went out for a walk—walked until the night was nearly past, until his legs could scarcely carry him, until he was almost dead from fatigue.

On the following evening he essayed a different form of composition. At Oxford he had written on religious subjects, and, as he remembered well, had of set purpose concerned himself with what he wished to say, caring little for the manner in which it was said. He fetched out a batch of manuscripts that had survived from that time, and thought he would glance through them. *Builders on Sand*—yes, this was the title of a series of papers that were one day to make a published volume. They were a confutation of all the arguments of doubters. He changed his mind about looking at them, and put them back in his desk without untying the string that held them together. He did not propose to write on religion now, but to give a turn to philosophical thought—the philosophy of everyday life, ethics of the commonplace.

And this he did, reversing his old plan, and striving now for graces of expression, trying to write really well, labouring at every phrase. He cancelled, re-wrote, would not be satisfied until, to his mental ear, the words had music. He thought of Addison, Ruskin, Flaubert—of all the stylists; and, with all his might, struggled to have a style himself.

This task succeeded better than the novel notes. He found real solace in it, and filled sad waking hours with it.

But his nights were now terrible. As soon as he slept he began to dream, and the dreams drew their source from that carnal side of human nature which, though controlled, ignored, rendered impotent for active evil, still inexorably exists. It is our inheritance from a dim past, the fading instinct that once played its useful part in the scheme of our descent and the fierce unceasing struggle for the continuance of the race; it is the afterglow of battle, lust, and rape that lurks like a hot memory in each of the myriad cells whereof our organisms are composed.

In dreams he was at the mercy of sensual desires. Things that he had always recoiled from allured and delighted him. He craved for forbidden joys, beckoned to the vicious servants of such infamy, imagined a luxurious feast of sin and called upon life to provide it. He was like one of the tempted Fathers about whom he used to read, but, unlike them, greedily yielding to temptation; he was like a wanderer in the Arabian Nights, a sailor in Limehouse Causeway, a debauchee student of the Quartier Latin; he was like a profligate as coarse and brutal as the man he hated.

An abominable ordeal that made sleep itself torture instead of relief. It was as though Nature, offended by rebellion against her laws, were treating him with unusual severity in order to prove herself supreme. He had ventured to be abnormal, she was bringing him back into line—as if, because he had escaped the stress and storm of adolescence, he was now in these dreams being galloped at break-neck speed through all those emotional experiences or mental states that should have been lengthily suffered and got rid of at their appointed time.

Yet, however vile the character of a dream, it changed at once if Lilian came into it. Then in a moment all became pure and sweet. Desire was more intense, but absolutely devoid of gross passion. He longed, as in his first dream of her, to take her hand and pass on, they two together, happy and alone. That was all. At sight of her evil was exorcised.

But there were many nights on which he did not see her, and in the morning after these he awoke feeling exhausted, shattered, robbed of all the hope that can sustain life: as one who, having passed through a dangerous illness, begins to understand that although he may go on living he will never really be himself again. He did not want to dress, to eat, or to leave the house. His was a misery that should not go stalking through the streets for all the world to gape at. He could scarcely bear to meet the eyes of that old man Philbrick. He was ashamed of, terrified by the wild beast inside him that was tearing him to pieces in these nocturnal rages.

Nevertheless he went on with his work; and this new phase passed, and was as if it had never been. The unwholesome fires had burned themselves out, or the breath of the spirit of evil had ceased to fan them. He no longer dreaded the moment when, sinking into unconsciousness, he unlocked the lower mechanism of his brain and opened every dark recess for the nerve currents to enter and come pouring out charged with wickedness.

The dreams had gone; but sleep had gone with them. He lay awake thinking, the higher brain centres hard at work now, making for him still another torment. Whether he wished it or not, he was forced to think argumentatively; to pass in review all his opinions, surmises, or convictions: to weigh them and test them. He felt a pressing necessity to be logical and exact in the process of his thoughts; and as the sleepless hours wore on, this need grew heavier and his ability to meet it less and less. It seemed to him—and the idea filled him with the alarm and horror that are the first fruits of insomnia—that he had lost the power of reasoning about even the simplest things, as well as about those that are greatest and most important.

Still he went on with his work; not sparing himself, toiling through the long, dull, meaningless days; incessantly, feverishly active, but in a confused vague manner, and sometimes having slips of memory that increased his labour and made the confusion worse. Thus he sent instructions to his bankers to sell a security that they had sold already, two months ago. He could not believe this possible. He had never had direct dealings with a stockbroker; all his business had been conducted for him by the bank, and he now wrote to the bank manager for a full and detailed statement in regard to his financial position. Receiving this, he muddled away two or three mornings in tardy accountancy, verifying or trying to verify everything by comparing the entries with his own notes and jottings of letters. The bank, of course, proved right, and he wrong. Fetching out more and more of his private papers, he established the correctness of the bank statement, and ascertained by the aid of a very simple arithmetic exactly how he now stood as a person of independent means. He had nearly run through his fortune; of invested capital there remained to him only so much as might be relied upon for an annual income of one hundred and three or four odd pounds.

He was astonished, but he did not care. He said to himself, "Then I have shot my bolt. I must stick to this money, or I shall lose my freedom. I can do no more now for Walsden or for anybody else." And he felt relief in recognition of the obvious fact that his benevolent schemes had, as it were, automatically come to an end; thinking again that he was thoroughly justified in guarding what was left to make his own future secure. "It is just enough," he thought, "to make me absolutely free—and personal freedom no man is called upon to sacrifice." Two pounds a week—that was his old figure. Ample. It was the sum he had allotted to himself years ago as all that portion of his fortune that really belonged to him; and curiously, without steadily pursued calculations, he had reached the pre-ordained limit.

XXX

Robert Vickers had come back from the first of the two political tours; his name was on bills that announced a public meeting; and one day Churchill passed him in the Commercial Road. They nodded to each other, but did not stop to talk. While he remained in London Churchill was haunted by thoughts of him.

Then, after he had gone again, Churchill had a letter from his wife. He trembled as he sat looking at her handwriting; he trembled more as he opened the envelope. What had she to say to him? She apologised for detaining a book that he had lent her, and promised to return it before long; and she further said, "I am going to the vicarage to-morrow afternoon to help at Mrs. Walsden's sewing class. May I come to Denmark House afterwards? I want to ask you one or two questions."

Churchill raised the letter to his lips, kissed it again and again. Then very slowly he tore it into almost microscopic pieces, and let them fall through his open fingers to the floor, whispering to himself the while. "Yes, my dear one, my sweet one, come to me to-morrow, come to me every day, stay with me and comfort me, even if I can never bring comfort to you." That was the answer that he wished to send, the only answer that would truly speak his thought.

He did not send it.

Walking about his room, he continued to whisper, "So now we are in the very thick of the fight. It is 'Fight now, Edward Churchill, or lay down your arms.'" And he laughed, once more remembering those Lives of the Fathers, the naive and direct narrations of tricky turns that the Devil can play when he tempts saintly men to destruction; visions in stone cells, wantons dressed in nuns' clothing; innocent birds, that sing like heaven's choristers, win one's heart, make one glad, and then change their clear note to pipe a message from hell. "Yes, quite a good trick of the Devil, this," and he laughed again—"to make it seem now that *she* cannot do without me; that when I avoid her, she follows me; that if I won't devise chances for wooing her, she will herself give me the occasion."

He knew with absolute certainty that, whatever unacknowledged tenderness might lie hidden in her thoughts of him, she had written not as a woman to a man but as a devout disciple to a priest. The book he had begged her to read and study was Father Bastian Upway's treatise on the Sacrament of Marriage. It is full of the most beautiful passages, in which mystery is made easier to understand than common fact, and faith seems to issue triumphantly from the printed words; but there are pages of abstruse analysis and subtle definition of which the drift or purpose is extremely difficult to follow. Edward Churchill had no doubt but that Lilian's questions would relate to the difficulties she had encountered while reading the book, and in imagination he went through the scene that would take place here to-morrow—if he allowed her to come. They would sit side by side at his desk over there; he would read aloud to her, pausing to expound and elucidate, but not thinking of what he said, merely absorbing happiness from her proximity—drinking joy, recovering nerve-force, beginning to live again after the death in life that these weeks of separation had truly been for him.

Thinking thus, he sat down at the desk and wrote to her.

> "DEAR MRS. VICKERS,
>
> "Unless the matter you wished to discuss is really urgent, I fear I must beg you to excuse me to-morrow. The fact is, I am so dreadfully busy just now that I have not a disengaged minute at my disposal. Of course, were it some matter in which you believed I could give you effectual help, I would put everything aside in order to receive you. But if I do not hear from you to the contrary, I shall assume that this is not the case and will consider the appointment postponed for the present.
>
> "Yours sincerely,
> EDWARD CHURCHILL."

He sat staring at his finished letter, thinking it the most atrocious thing that pen and paper had ever made. To send that to *her!* The odious formal phrases filled him with disgust—it was like the letter of a doctor to a troublesome patient, of a tradesman to a customer whose custom had ceased to be worth retaining. But, so far as the wording went, it was also quite the usual letter of a busy priest to one of his congregation.

He posted it with his own hand, and ascertained from the tablet on the pillar box that it would go by a post sufficiently early to ensure its delivery before nightfall. If, therefore, she wanted to see him very much indeed, there would be time for her to write and say so. Perhaps he would hear from her to-morrow morning. Perhaps she would come after all.

But next morning he looked for her handwriting in vain. And all that afternoon he sat indoors, manfully fighting temptation. He could not trust himself to go out of the house, he scarcely dared to move from his chair, so severe was the battle and so imminent the danger of yielding once for all, and confessing himself beaten.

He thought, "Now she is on her way to the vicarage. I could easily meet her before she gets there. Now she has arrived. The class has assembled. They are all together in the drawing-room. I could go there, just open the drawing-room door, and see her face. I could say I had come to speak to Mrs. Walsden. It would be perfectly natural and proper; for in sober truth I do want to speak to her."

The ready excuse of a businesslike communication to be made to the vicar's wife added force to the longings that tempted him. Still he was strong enough to resist them. What he had to say to Mrs. Walsden would keep: there was no need for any hurry about it.

But the hour when he thought of Lilian leaving the vicarage, passing at a distance of three hundred yards, going slowly through the streets alone—then the temptation was agony. The calm May evening, the softening light, the faint rustle of the plane tree leaves—all things seemed to aid in tempting him, seemed to call him and to deride him. Why was he lurking in this room, shrinking back among the shadows, asking for darkness and emptiness, when destiny offered colour and light and joy? Not because he was a saint, but because he was a coward—mocking voices seemed to dare him. Only cowards hide and skulk like this: brave men are not afraid of life: they go forth and meet it bravely.

As always now, concentrated thought about her created a vivid mental vision of her. He saw her looking towards him—just a glance in the direction of Denmark House, before she turned down Vaughan Street. And he saw her walking away from him, pale, sad, alone.

He moved to one of the window seats, as the farthest possible point from the door through which he would pass if he rushed to overtake her; and sitting here, looking down into the green branches and the little patch of walled garden, he clenched his fists, writhed, and groaned in agony.

He waited until it was dark, until all chance of seeing her had long since gone, and then he went round to the vicarage and gave his message to Mrs. Walsden. This small parochial duty accomplished, he had no further business at the vicarage; but he lingered, hoping that Mrs. Walsden would speak of her sewing class and the people who had attended it. She did not do so, and before he could tear himself away he was compelled to ask a question.

"Was Mrs. Vickers here this afternoon?"

"Yes, she was. How ill she's looking!"

"Ill!" The notion of her being ill appalled him; and he asked more questions, eagerly, almost breathlessly. How ill? Did Mrs. Walsden mean anything serious, or merely some slight indisposition?

Mrs. Walsden, answering rather carelessly but quite kindly and reassuringly, said she only meant that Mrs. Vickers appeared "pasty and peeky, unhealthily pale, and with nasty bilious-looking circles round her eyes."

"I told her that if she felt as seedy as she looked, she ought not to have troubled to come all this way on my account. But she said she enjoyed it. She is a kind creature—always glad to lend one a helping hand."

If she were to fall ill—if she were to die. It would be the end of the world to him—nothing less. Large as the earth is, he would never be able to find a pleasant place on it when once she had ceased to be numbered among its inhabitants. Heaven would not be heaven if he could not meet her in it. Hell would not be hell if he might go there with her hand in hand.

Wild thoughts swept through his mind as he walked away from the vicarage. If she were really ill he must go straight to her. But he knew that she was not really ill: she was only tired and unhappy.

He thought with astonishment, but with no anger, of the preposterous adjectives that Mrs. Walsden had used when speaking of the pallor that made her so touchingly beautiful, of those shadows that gave such splendour to her eyes, and indeed to the whole of her delicate face, making it mysterious, pathetic, unforgettable. To Mrs. Walsden, perhaps, she was scarcely pretty, and not in the least fascinating. How marvellous! No one saw her as he saw her. He fully realised the individual appeal of this woman. To him it was terrific and overpowering: while perhaps no one else could even perceive it. And he thought, "Yes, that is love."

Reaching the lamps and noise of the main thoroughfare, he suddenly found himself in the midst of a crowd. A man had been seized with a fit, had fallen, and was now rolling and bouncing about the pavement in convulsions. A policeman stooping over him was tripped up and fell; Churchill tried to help and went down also; half a dozen other people were endeavouring to hold the poor fellow; for a little while it was like a football scrimmage. Then the sufferer, stretched upon his back, was secured by many hands; and presently he lay quite still, foaming at the mouth and groaning.

He was a fine-looking man of forty or so, respectably dressed in black clothes, and with a strong, handsome face that Churchill felt sure he had seen before. The policeman had sent for an ambulance, and he was now busy with the crowd, who would not go away, although obviously all amusement or entertainment was over.

"Now, pass along," said the policeman. "Stand back, can't you? Give him air. What's the sense of trying to suffocate him?"

Churchill asked that when the ambulance arrived the man might be taken to Denmark House, instead of to the hospital or the police station. He undertook to look after the man and provide medical treatment and nursing.

He knew the man; he and the man had met before—but where? He remembered the face, and, when presently the eyelids blinked and lifted, he remembered the eyes. They stared glassily up at him. He knew that he had seen that glassy stare and had been uncomfortably affected by it then as now; and when this happened there had been lamplight on the face as at present.

The ambulance came, the man was lifted upon it, and at the same moment he began to talk mutteringly. Churchill, stooping down to replace a dangling arm, heard what he said and was strangely startled.

"Heaven or hell. Which is it to be? Are you going to heaven or going to hell?"

Churchill remembered then when he had met the man. It was the mad preacher, seen and heard by him on his first Saturday night at St. Bede's, who stood at the lamp-lit corner with the crowd jostling him but taking no notice of him while he talked unceasingly of heaven and hell.

He went on talking about them now, as the ambulance began to move, raising his voice to a laboured shout.

"Heaven and hell. Oh, my friends, do you understand it is the one place or the other? Which is it to be? Heaven or hell? . . , Heaven or hell? . . . Heaven or hell?"

XXXI

The man's name was Elvey, and until quite recently he had been in receipt of a good salary as an engineer's draughtsman at one of the Thames ironworks. Then, falling ill, he had lost his employment. He had taken up his "mission" eight years ago, after a "summons" that came to him in the form of "nocturnal voices, the echo of lamentation, and the sound of a rushing mighty wind;" and from that period till now he had been regularly preaching. If he possessed any friends or relations, he appeared to have forgotten all about them. Earthly ties were not worth attention in presence of the eternal danger and the eternal hope.

He imparted this much of his story to Churchill, who often sat by his bedside during the first day or two after his arrival at Denmark House. He offered no thanks for Churchill's hospitality; nor did he make any inquiries as to the nature of the establishment in which he found himself; he lay with his hands clasped behind his head, staring at the walls or ceiling of the bedroom as though he could see through them and hundreds of miles beyond them.

The doctor said that he was suffering from the exhaustion of nervous energy that invariably follows such a seizure as his. He might require a good many weeks' rest, but in a greater or less time his strength would be restored and then he would be all right again—that is to say, as right as he would ever be.

According to the doctor he was a very ordinary type of the religious epileptic. He was not mad enough as yet to shut up; for although his views of religion plainly indicated aberration, still they were views which in a less violent or extreme form were held by large numbers of people; and with regard to the everyday matters of life he was sufficiently sane to conduct himself with propriety. For instance, he had been able to retain his employment as a highly skilled workman. As to the prognosis of the case—well, it was not favourable. He would probably have many attacks, and die mad, really mad, ravingly mad.

"Can I do anything else for him than what is being done?"

"No," said the doctor, "let him rest as long as he likes, and then he will go away."

"But ought I to allow him to go?"

"You could not prevent his going if you tried. It would be just the same if *we* had him at our shop. When he made up his mind to get up and go, our whole staff wouldn't be able to stop him."

Truly Churchill felt no desire to detain poor Elvey. Never before had there been a guest at Denmark House so strangely inexplicably unwelcome to him. Had he recognised the mad street preacher a little earlier, certainly had he heard him mutter those words about heaven and hell, he could not have overcome his disinclination; he might still have wished to do so, and thought that duty told him to do it, but he could not have brought the man here into the same house with himself.

This kind doctor, who attended to Denmark House patients gratuitously, was one of Churchill's friends from the London Hospital, and he spoke of other friends or acquaintances at that noble and nobly conducted institution. Talking with him, Churchill heard the latest news of their physiological research work, brilliant feats of curative surgery, patient toil producing marvels in the laboratory. As he knew, the place was a hive of industry. And his friend gave him a particularly striking example of the perils that such industry sometimes entails—perils so great, it would seem, that no one could be justified in facing them, unless sure of some splendid inpalpable reward alike for failure and for success. No material reward do they either expect or receive.

A young, highly esteemed bacteriologist, pursuing a special and very hopeful line in the cultivation of pestilential germs, had fatally poisoned himself. He and everybody else in the hospital knew that he was done for. He might live for three years, and the last of those three years would be most dreadful. But he was perfectly cheerful and jolly, going on with his investigation, pursuing the happy line, only perhaps working longer hours and with greater ardour since now time was so short. His one anxiety had been lest he should become a source of danger to others; once satisfied that with certain precautions he would be a safe companion, he worried no more. But an immediate stoppage of the work and banishment from the only place in which the work was possible would have broken his heart.

And Edward Churchill thought, "Yet he is almost certainly an unbeliever. None of these men are believers in our sense of the word. They are not Christians in their faith, though most Christian in their actions. They sacrifice themselves for others, they live for others, they die for others. But they ask nothing for themselves. They do not believe that God came down from heaven and dwelt upon earth, showing the hard way but promising the blissful ease."

All that evening he thought about the countless people who do not hold the Christian faith. The world is peopled with unbelievers. More ancient religions have continued, newer religions have been inaugurated; agnosticism, vague speculation, sheer indifference, have proved as formidable rivals to Christianity as any of the formulated creeds. Musingly, he considered not only the ninety per cent. of non-Christians that dwelt all round him, and the vast hordes of untutored heathen beloved by Walsden, but the great civilised races—the wise Chinese, the brave Japs, the fiery, far-spreading Turks.

He wrote a little; thought again, wrote again. Then he began to turn the leaves of Whitaker's Almanac, reading the estimated populations of Buddhist nations, looking for the total set down for the followers of Mohammedanism, wondering if he would presently find a table that gave the proportionate aggregates and showed how many Christians there were altogether—pretended Christians; for of course any such stated number would include all who professed to belong, or had *ever* professed to belong, to the Christian Church.

Presently he raised his head, and listened. He fancied that he had heard a voice—somebody calling to him from a distance. It was late now; every one had come in long ago. For a minute, while he sat listening, the silence remained unbroken; then he heard the voice again.

He went out of his room, to the first floor landing, and turned on an electric lamp. He could hear the voice distinctly now. It was Elvey's. He went upstairs to Elvey's room and opened the door.

"You were talking, weren't you? Do you want anything?"

"No, thank you," said Elvey. "I was only talking to myself. I often do at night. It refreshes me. But I'm sorry I disturbed you. I didn't think I'd be overheard."

"Oh, that's no consequence—so long as you don't disturb the others. Good-night."

Churchill closed the bedroom door, and stood for a little while outside it. Elvey began talking again almost immediately, but in a lower voice.

"Heaven or hell. I have chosen heaven. It is there that I fix my eyes. . . ."

Churchill went downstairs, unbolted the front door, and left the house in order to get a breath of air. Returning after half an hour he stood in the hall and listened. Faint and distant, coming to him from the top of the house, that same monotonous recitation grew audible. He ascended the stairs, past his own room, as if drawn upward by the voice; then when he was high enough to catch each word, he paused and sat upon a stair-step, holding his head in his hands.

"I say unto you, except ye believe, ye shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven"—the voice went on monotonously. "You are all in danger of hell fire. It is heaven or hell. . . ."

And Edward Churchill thought: "Yes, a madman—a madman lying all alone in the darkness, and talking of things that no living eye has ever seen."

The presence of this guest in the house worried him, and had a bad effect on his nerves; but the visit did not last long. One morning quite early Elvey got up, washed, carefully brushed his clothes, and dressed himself; then, having gone out and got shaved, he tapped at Churchill's door and said good-bye.

"Where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"I must go to Glasgow," said Elvey. "I have read about it in the newspapers. It is a wicked city. I must go there at once and warn them. I have warned London for eight years. Glasgow is the next biggest place. I must go to Glasgow now."

"How do you propose to travel there?"

"I shall walk."

"Elvey, I don't think you're quite up to that yet. Let me give you your rail fare."

"No, thank you. I prefer to walk. There is great wickedness in the country villages of England, and I mean to warn them as I pass. Good-bye;" and disregarding Churchill's outstretched hand, he turned and went out of the room. Nothing could have prevented him from going; no one could materially affect the future that lay before him. He had his mission and his doom: he would fulfil both.

A day or two after Elvey's departure Mrs. Clough, the housekeeper, opened the door of Churchill's sitting-room, and, looking in, saw him busy at his desk.

"Ah, you *are* there," said the housekeeper. "I thought you was, but wasn't sure. It's Mrs. Vickers would like to speak to you, if you can spare her a minute."

"Oh, Mrs. Vickers!" And he hesitated. "Yes, I will come down to her."

"You won't see her in here? Very good," said Mrs. Clough. "I've brought her upstairs with me, but I'll take her down again."

"No, of course not. I didn't understand;" and he hastily rose from his chair. "Mrs. Vickers, please come in."

The door had remained open, and obviously anybody outside must have heard all that he and Mrs. Clough were saying. That this had indeed happened was made still further evident by the extreme embarrassment of Lilian Vickers's manner.

"Mr. Churchill, I'm so very sorry to disturb you. Please forgive me."

"Oh, not at all," he said feebly.

"I have brought you back *The Sacrament of Marriage.* Thank you for lending it to me."

"Er—not in the least. Did you read it?"

"Yes, I really studied it carefully—and as I was passing, I thought I would bring it myself;" and she put the book on the corner of his desk. It was neatly tied up in brown paper, as though something precious that must not run any risks of getting soiled when carried about in trams. "I thought," she said, looking down at the parcel—"I hoped that perhaps——"

"Yes," he said, divining her thought, "I know—I understand. For us to talk about it! For me to tell you anything that I—that I——"

"Yes, if you could have spared time—that is what I hoped."

He had not asked her to sit down. They stood looking at each other, she at the corner of the big desk, he standing behind his chair with his hands tightly gripping the back of it.

"I guessed that immediately," he said. "But it is unfortunate—you find me at the moment——" and he stopped short and coughed. She was looking at him inquiringly, anxiously, and, as it seemed, reproachfully. She wore no veil, so that the pallor of her face, those dusky circles round her eyes, and the slight trembling of her lips, were fully visible to him. "Mrs. Vickers," he said abruptly, "how are you—in your health?"

"Oh, I am quite well, thank you."

"Some one told me you looked ill—it was Mrs. Walsden. But you have not been ill really?"

"Oh, no. I did feel the beginning of the warm weather. It gave me headaches."

"Is your head aching now?"

"No, not at all."

"'I—I am glad to hear that. I hope you will take care of yourself. . . . But about the book—yes, I ventured—when I wrote—to explain that I am unusually harassed, and therefore to excuse myself from——"

"Yes, I got your letter."

"I hope you understood. You—you weren't offended?"

"*I* offended? How could I be?" Then suddenly her face flushed. "But, Mr. Churchill, I couldn't help thinking that perhaps—for some reason—you were rather offended with *me*."

"No—most certainly not. Why? How did you get such an utterly mistaken idea?"

"I wouldn't have had it if I'd been quite sure that it was really because you were so busy that you didn't want to see me. But you have been so kind—and then I began to think you might fancy that all your trouble had been wasted, and that I wasn't even trying to do what you'd said," and her voice broke.

"I did not fancy it for a moment. No, on my honour, it was no reason of that sort."

"Then I won't think so. But truly this is why I have come troubling you now. I felt that I *must* come and tell you that no word of yours had been lost—that I have obeyed you—that I have been much braver—that I—that I don't mean to do any of the things I spoke of."

"No, you must be brave—you must just be brave."

"And, Mr. Churchill, if I haven't understood all Father Upway says, I see that it is all of it true."

"Yes, that is it. Never mind the rest. Essentials—stick to essentials. Don't go too deep. Be satisfied with the main principle." He was speaking hurriedly and inconsecutively; and when she turned as though about to go, he abruptly asked her to sit down for a few minutes. "The fact is—as I tried to explain—you catch me unprepared—at an unlucky time—that is, for *me*, personally. Nothing to do with you—of course;" and he walked across to one of the windows and looked out. "You have shown such confidence, such frankness in dealing with me, Mrs. Vickers—and I assure you I am touched by it—that I feel bound to be frank myself. Well, then, I wish to explain." He had said this in the same hurried tone, and without looking at her. Now he faced round from the window, clasped his hands behind his back, and spoke slowly, gently, as one struggling to choose the words that may best serve his purpose. "Because of various circumstances, no remarks of mine about Upway's teaching could possess the slightest value. Indeed, I could not trust myself to discuss it. For some weeks I have been excessively harassed. Moreover, frankly—returning confidence for confidence—I too am not happy. Mrs. Vickers, I am very unhappy. And my present state of mind—the egoism one cannot escape from unquestionably warps, even destroys one's power to think as one should of other people's ideas. This being so, I feel that I can no longer speak to you as a priest. I—I can not hope to help you further."

"I am sorry."

"No, don't be sorry. You see, I have told you your duty. That is, I have put before you—very severely, yet not more severely than any priest would have done—the religious view—the er—the—the view of the Catholic Church."

"Yes—and I humbly submit."

"You do. You are brave and good. That again proves that I cannot help you further. So that is why—taking everything into consideration—I think it better you should not come back here again—that I ask you not to come back unless you are in pressing trouble;" and, unconsciously perhaps, he used a turn of phrase that he had heard on Walsden's lips. "You know: the sort of trouble in which a *brother*—and not a priest—might help you."

Lilian Vickers had got up from her chair. She was flushing again; but she grew white in a moment as he came towards her.

"You do understand, don't you?" he said, as he shook hands with her.

"Oh, quite."

"You know that I am deeply interested—and shall always be—in all that concerns you."

"Yes, thank you. You are very kind. . . . No, please don't come downstairs with me. Good-bye."

And as he stood at the door holding it open for her, he noticed her tallness, her unusually erect carriage, and something about her more dignified and self-reliant than he had ever observed before.

He watched her go down the stairs; then went into one of the front rooms and watched her from the window. She seemed now to walk sadly, but still proudly. And then just before she disappeared, she seemed to droop, to move languidly, wearily; and he wanted to rush out of the house, to follow her, to implore her to forget what he had said, to come back again and again and again.

Once more he conquered a violent impulse; but the effort that successfully inhibited action was followed by a reflex of fierce revolt in the realm of thought.

Why not have yielded? Why preach that doctrine of blind submission? Why might she not escape from her bondage, divorce the brutal tyrant, and find a mate who, if not worthy of her, would at least love her more devotedly than any woman has ever yet been loved?

He thought of the only possible answer to these questions. "Because by so doing we should break the divine law." And then came more questions. "But do I myself believe in the law? Does any divine law exist?"

XXXII

It was late at night! no distant, monotonous voice now disturbed the silence of the house as Churchill sat reading those manuscript notes that he had put together years ago at Oxford.

Builders on Sand—that was the title he had intended to give them if they ever appeared in print. They were a vindication of the Christian faith, a demolition of the specious arguments of its enemies, and he remembered his feelings while writing them: the pleasure derived from the exercise of intellectual power, the satisfied thrill that comes in moments of triumphant success, the quieter contentment derived from a task fairly started and smoothly proceeding to a workman-like completion. He remembered that in the act of scribbling certain passages he had felt rather sorry for the scientific doubters with whom he dealt. They deserved punishment, but he was perhaps belabouring them a little too heavily when they no longer had a leg to stand on.

He read the notes very carefully, and they seemed to him childish nonsense. He read with equal care his extracts from the impious, unbelieving books, and they seemed to him sober direct statements of irrefutable facts.

Then he sat quietly musing; for a little while quite calm, pleasantly interested, enjoying this leisurely meditation. He thought of that first deathbed scene, of his ecstasy of prayer, of his rapture when the dying man had a vision of high heaven. He himself *felt* the nearness of God—some transcendental presence that swept into the sordid little room, instantaneously filling it with glory. And the man's last flicker of consciousness was a certainty of salvation; so that he died not as a person who slips or trips in front of an express train and with agonised terror struggles to escape from approaching annihiliation, but as a happy child who enters the train itself to take the swift easy journey to the promised land of long and joyous holiday. Yes, but all that was illusion.

The illusion had worn thinner and thinner at subsequent deathbeds, when Churchill knelt praying but not really believing. He had not understood why and how the glamour had faded. He knew now. Again and again of late he had been tortured by the cruelty of such scenes, when the doomed ones clung to life and craved for nothing except a reprieve from the grave. He had thought: Why tell these people that they are going to die? Poor wretches! The wives and mothers *prepare* them for the parson. Why not concentrate all efforts on making them oblivious of danger in their last hours?

That pleasant pause of mental calm passed away, and the hot revolt that had begun this afternoon, when with cut-and-dried phrases he drove from him the woman he adored, burst into renewed activity. He got up, walked about the room, talking aloud to himself. "Am I to confess, then, that I have simply been the slave of superstition? At first I was its abject and unquestioning slave. Then I must truly have known that my state was slavery, but I would not attempt to free myself. I became the slave of habit."

Doubtless his belief had been gone for a considerable time; that dread lest others should waver in their faith had probably been symptomatic of what was happening to himself, but this was the shock of recognition of the fact. For him the whole Christian legend had tumbled into dust. He saw it as futile, childish nonsense. The questions of those poor costermongers about "The Son of Gawd" were unanswerable, had always been unanswerable. The story of the divine atonement was utter bosh from the first word to the last.

Yet even now he was struggling against the acceptance of such terrible thoughts as these. If he could not throw them off, it would mean an admission of idiotic failure; it would mean that all his youth and the better part of his manhood had been wasted; it would mean that instead of permitting the natural growth of his intellect, he had starved it and distorted it so abominably that all the fruit it bore was rotten and unsound.

Then he ceased to struggle, saying to himself, "This was inevitable. And if it is the truth I must face it. Little by little everything has been taken from me—my mother's love, the anchorage of home, all hope of happiness in married life; I have been slowly and inexorably forced back upon myself; at last I stand absolutely alone. My mind is all that I possess. Why should I be afraid of it?"

And all through the night he raged and reasoned, driven by a wild anger against himself and everybody else; against the generations of fools who had handed down all the cumbrous machinery of mental servitude; against the State that aided and supported medieval folly and trampled on those who tried to emancipate mankind; against the teachers who darken the eyes and burden the spirits of poor little innocent children; against schools like St. Martyr's, towns like St. Dunstan's, universities like Oxford—against everything great and small that had had its share in befogging, benighting, and befooling him. He worked himself to a fury that was akin to delirium; knowing that his thoughts were wickedly unjust, and yet giving them full scope, stimulating them, flogging them to increased activity.

Nothing in the legend! It is shattered by historical research, by the revelations of science, by common sense.

He thought of all the ridiculous new sects that year after year had split away from the Church and set up business on their own account—hundreds of them, here in England alone. Well, the fault is not theirs, but that of the orthodox faith—a religion for children. How, unaltered, should it retain grown men?

He thought of the great mass of modern clergymen. If they are strong men—real men—they revolt against it. But for pride's sake—rather than own themselves fools from the beginning—they build up something from the crashing ruin of the thought-fabric; desperately toiling, as black ants when the storm has washed away their city, they strive to make order in chaos.

Christ was a man like themselves. We can all be Christ. God is in us. God, the great creating thought, is the spirit that quickens the universe. The highest manifestation of God, the living force, is in the mind of men.

God's favourite abode or resting-place is to be found in that grey cerebral matter of a centralised nervous system —of man, and of the higher mammals, perhaps, also. For you can't shut the animals out of it all—you can't keep the other worlds out of it either. There may be beings not enormously dissimilar to men, higher intelligences even, on Mars, on planets of other suns—in millions of worlds, if you like. It is really a frenzied effort to patch together something that will somehow hold water.

Thus you get from these strong unhappy men the Gospel according to the Rev. J. Snooks, Revelations by Mr. Brown, The Law and the Prophets as interpreted by Thomas Nathaniel Jones, D.D. *Most* unorthodox! But the bishops are unable, unwilling to interfere; sympathising rather than persecuting, because they too are in secret revolt.

And he said to himself, "That old archbishop was an unbeliever. He scarcely troubled to conceal the secret. One could read it in his smile when, behaving like a hysterical schoolgirl, I flopped down on my knees and made him bless me. If the blessing hasn't had much effect, at least I needn't blame *him*. He didn't palm it off on me as something valuable."

He thought: People like Walsden, Verschoyle, that ancient of days at Sittingbourne, and all down the scale to epileptics like Elvey, are simply monomaniacs. But for the rest, not one clergyman in ten really believes. "Nevertheless, it is comforting for old ladies—it can do no harm." In the temple of their own hearts the veil has been rent. "Notwithstanding, on its merely *human* side, we still consider it extremely beautiful." They could not say more than that—not if they examined their deepest convictions and dared faithfully to utter them.

Lashing himself to almost delirious fury, he said, "Only cowards can pretend to themselves to believe. Only cowards can refuse the light of truth that glimmers in every man's brain."

As he thought of these things, Edward Churchill felt that he would go mad, unless quickly he broke with it all and began to forget.

Next morning he was absolutely worn out. It had been the most dreadful night that he had ever passed. When he looked back at its hot rages, its brutal violences, its sweepingly cruel accusations against numberless unknown men whose single-heartedness he had always hitherto respected and could not now logically or sanely question, it seemed to him more like a demoniac possession than any explicable nerve storm. It reminded him again of the biographical fables of early monastic literature. Just such a night, hundreds of years ago, might have served for the culminating description of a sorely tempted monk in his stone cell. He has withstood all the temptations of the senses, minor demons with their visions of female seductiveness can make nothing of him; starved, flogged, drained of blood, he defies the lures that appeal only to matter, and his spirit remains triumphant. So then the Devil himself enters into his mind, tears and claws at the very foundations of his strength, shakes him with remorseless frenzy from sundown to sunrise.

He stayed indoors all day, and on the following night he was able to sleep. On the day after he felt calm, but unspeakably sad.

He thought, "If my loss of faith is to be a permanent loss, I have lost all that made life worth living. I am too old to begin again. I can never readjust myself to the new conditions. I shall commit suicide, and save all further bother. No one will miss me; no one will regret me. But, oh, how futile I shall have proved myself."

But the faith might return. As he knew, many priests go through periods of disbelief, and then believe again. Men who call themselves atheists during long stretches of years become devout and staunch Christians. Scientists who spend their lives in explaining everything find at last that they have explained nothing, cease to docket and label their incomprehensible mysteries, cease to inquire, cease to expect any answers, and with empty receptive minds take back the peaceful hope of knowing all in God's good time.

Perhaps he, too, would recover his belief. He determined to say nothing as yet to Walsden, to continue working as long as possible, and to trust that another mental change might come. But his confidence was weak.

Late on Sunday evening he went out to St. Ursula's rectory to see the Verschoyles. Both of them had been writing to him of late, urging him not to desert them, and Mrs. Verschoyle had especially begged him to pay them a visit this afternoon.

It was a dark, airless night, and as he slowly made his way from the rectory gate through the darkness towards the lighted window of the porch he felt the oppression of the atmosphere as well as the dull weight on his mind. He paused irresolute, and was more inclined to prowl about the dark garden all alone with his sad thoughts than to enter a brightly-lighted room and laugh and talk.

He found several people in the drawing-room, and the conversation ran so freely that he was not called upon to take any large part in it. He sat there thinking of what this room had been to him such a little while ago—his harbour of refuge, his place of beauty, the pleasant dwelling-house of faith and hope. All was as it had been. Only he had changed. Verschoyle and the young curates made him sit in the biggest arm-chair; he was told to smoke; and the friendly simple talk went on. He was glad that no confidences or brotherly confessions were possible; but Mrs. Verschoyle looked at him from time to time with quick, searching glances.

When he left, it was she and not Verschoyle who came out, and through the hall with him.

"Tell me," she said, putting her hand on his arm, "what's the matter. Are you still worrying yourself about that poor woman?"

"No," he said. And this was true, for in these last few days he had scarcely remembered Lilian's existence. He had been thinking only of himself.

"Christian," she said, "tell me—trust me." He went down the steps, and she stood above him in the light of the porch. "Won't you tell me?"

He looked at her, but did not speak.

"Christian, what is it? What is there in the pathway now?"

"It is the Giant Despair; and this time I shall not escape from him."

And he turned and went towards the gate.

"Stay. I can't let you go like this, Christian," she called after him, but he would not answer. She heard his footsteps in the darkness, the gate opened and shut, and she knew that he had gone.

XXXIII

THROUGHOUT this week the weather grew warmer and enervating; thunder was always threatening, but never came; even Walsden complained that he felt slack, and made many disparaging comparisons between the climate of England and that of Africa. Mrs. Walsden one afternoon at tea had a sudden and ardent fancy for lettuces, which unfortunately could not be procured; for Mr. Grevill and Mr. Nape, going round the parish in haste, found that not a sprig of green food remained uneaten. The lettuces had been devoured, and indeed the "hokey-pokey" was nearly all gone too. The ice merchants could not supply it quick enough or in sufficient bulk to meet the demand. The whole parish of St. Bede's seemed to be either moistening its lips or gasping for breath.

Edward Churchill still attended to his work in a hopeless mechanical manner like a sleep-walker who walks safely on a well-known round. But his Roman collar galled him, his cossack stifled him, his biretta was as uncomfortable as a merry-andrew's cap and bells.

Twice Mrs. Verschoyle wrote to him, and once her husband tried in vain to see him; but he took no notice either of the letters or the visit. He could not act on their well-meant advice. Mrs. Verschoyle implored him to do a retreat. "Go first," she wrote, "to Father Bryan, and ask if they can receive you at their Roehampton House. You know they would be glad to have you there, if the place is not full. But of course the summer retreats are now on. If not to Roehampton, go somewhere else. Father Bryan will guide you. Go at once. I pray you, don't let anything stop you. This is more important than parish work, however pressing that may appear."

No Verschoyles, no Bryans, no retreats could help him. He had passed beyond the reach of such kindly aid. It mattered not where he went, for everywhere he would carry the same thoughts with him.

So the weeks dragged by, and it was again Sunday. He felt an immense lassitude after the morning service; but fortunately the heaviest part of the day's work was now finished, and he had nothing more to do till Evensong. One small duty might be performed in the afternoon, and for this purpose he relinquished the quiet and repose of Denmark House. He wanted to see if three children who had promised to attend the children's service were keeping their promise; but he did not want to be seen himself, lest he should distract the attention of these and other young people, and put out Mr. Nape. Mr. Nape conducted the children's services remarkably well, but he was easily flustered, and had told Walsden that the presence of his more experienced colleagues made him nervous and self-conscious.

Churchill intended, therefore, to go to the organ gallery over the west door, and take a peep at things from there. As he went up the stairs to the gallery the first hymn began, and he thought that poor old Mrs. Walsden was rolling out the music very decently. It was the hymn about faith, hope, and charity—"Therefore give us love."

There were only two rows of seats in this western gallery, and curtains on brass rods hung in front of the second row, which was level with the organist's seat. Churchill gently opened a space between two curtains; then seated himself, and leaning his chin on his hands, looked down into the church.

The three children were there—three little faithful hearts proving true to the promise. He was touched by their fidelity, when he thought of what they had sacrificed—the open air, a street game, freedom. And the hymn, too—always a favourite—affected him, as sung by all these young voices in the dull, severe church. Moved by the force of habit, he prayed for his three. . . . "Oh, therefore give them love."

The music of the hymn sounded grandly, and when it ceased he turned to look at Mrs. Walsden. But the player was not Mrs. Walsden. It was Lilian.

She had seen him—he knew that instinctively. She was stooping over the keys, showing him only her profile; her hands like white lilies fluttering up and down while she worked the stops, and her whole drooping pose as of a flower that has been beaten by cruel storms. She was playing the responses; pausing, listening, glancing at the reflection in the slanted looking-glass, then playing again.

If he had not yet fully measured the extent of her power over him, he must do so now. In a moment the world had changed. The church became glorious as a cathedral. She was filling it with heavenly music; waves of beauty were pouring out from her; floods of sunlight that she had suddenly released fell upon flaxen heads, and made the children angels. And he thought: "'Therefore give us love. . . . Yes, this love and no other. . . . Take heaven and the endless ages, and the bliss and the rising scale of supernatural power when our souls shall be endued with divine force; take all hope of hereafter, but while we are here and now, oh, give us love."

His emotion overwhelmed him, so that he sat limply as he had settled down under the shock of surprise and delight at seeing her.

When she had done playing the responses she looked at him, and he immediately moved along the seat to the edge of the keyboard, and they talked in a low voice.

"Why are you here?"

"Mrs. Walsden said it would be convenient to her."

"Yes, you are always kind. I quite understand. You came instead of her."

"Yes, I came instead."

"Have you all the music there? Or can I fetch anything for you?"

"No, it is all here."

She played again; and he sat watching her hands, the delicate fingers meekly, sweetly toiling, hurrying off the keys to the stops and back to their labour. Then he looked at her face—the lips just open, the long eyelashes half raised, and the steady patient eyes never shifting from their study of the music sheet, the whole expression painstaking. Yes, painstaking. Pain had been her portion. He looked once more at her hands—they fascinated him; never still, now here, now there, untiring.

While playing the last verse of a second hymn she spoke, but without shifting her eyes. "Don't watch my hands, please. You are making me nervous."

And presently she turned and smiled. And her smile was like a sunbeam that changed to a knife as it entered his breast—seeming to make his heart bleed and the hot stifling blood fill his lungs, and rise to his throat to choke him. So exquisitely pathetic, in its trembling, flickering beauty, and its piteous appeal: saying to him, "You see, I am long-suffering; but I am weak. Be merciful and kind."

It was his own thought that had made all the pain really. He had thought, "Perhaps that is how she looks at her husband, when his rage is breaking loose because her weakness tempts him; when she says, 'I'll do anything you like. Oh, don't, don't beat me.' "

At the conclusion of the service he asked her what she had to do next.

"I am going home."

"Shall I come with you—some of the way?"

"No."

"Are you expected home?"

"No."

"Is your husband away?"

"Yes."

"When does he return?"

"Not for three days. He only left yesterday."

"Then there's no hurry for you to get back, since you are alone. Come in to tea at the vicarage."

"No, I won't do that."

"They would love to see you."

"Yes, but I am rather tired. I don't feel up to talking."

"Come to Denmark House, and let me give you some tea there. You can sit and rest—and it will be cooler there."

"It has been very hot to-day."

"Yes. Will you do what I ask?"

"You told me not to go there again."

"I know. But now I ask you to come. Yes, you must please do that. You can lie down and rest after tea, if you like. Mrs. Clough will be there to look after you."

She did not make any reply. She was fingering the silent keys.

"Yes," he said, "we'll wait here until every one has gone out. Then we will go."

They remained, talking of things about which neither was greatly interested—Mr. Nape's excellent manner with the children, the rusty condition of the curtain rods, the weather. Then they went side by side through the horrid, airless street to his house, where he led her up to the sitting-room, procured tea, and waited upon her.

Then they sat in the window seat above the plane tree branches, talking quietly, with long intervals of silence.

At last she spoke of her husband, saying that he was dissatisfied with the results of his tour in the south of England. He had been there in London throughout the past week; and after his return next Wednesday he would probably be here for the rest of the summer.

"Won't he take you—or arrange for you to have some sort of holiday?"

"I don't think so;" and she turned away her head. "I am not complaining. Truly I have obeyed you. I am bearing everything in—in the spirit of submission."

He knew that he ought not to ask her even indirectly how she had been treated during this week, yet knew also that he would do so.

"Apart from all that—the religious part, is life better with you?"

"No, just as difficult as ever;" and there was a little sob in her voice. She got up at once. "I must go now;" and she stood looking at him.

"Lilian."

He had put his arms round her, and he drew her down upon his knees.

"My bruised lily. My poor darling. Oh, what are we to do?"

So they remained, silent, clinging, locked in each other's arms; she with eyelids closed upon her tears and a cold wet face that did not warm to his kisses; he half fainting with pity and love. It was like an embrace of despair, and not the strong passionate grasping at joy or hope of two lovers who kiss for the first time. They were both so miserable that they could no longer resist betraying their misery. The paramount need of each was the forgetting of pain; they wanted to destroy the past and had no thought of opening the future; they were as innocent of base desire as unhappy children who are left alone in a darkened room after suffering a cruel punishment, and who instinctively link hands and try to comfort each other.

But soon she became ashamed, and struggled to release herself. He set her free at once, and they sat side by side in the window seat for a long time without speaking.

"I had better go."

"No," he said. "Wait. Let me think a little;" and he took her hand, and held it.

"I had better go," she said again. "I ought not to have come. It is why you told me not to—— You were afraid of this happening."

"Yes. . . . And now it has happened, nothing can undo it. It is the end of all pretences. You feel that yourself, don't you?"

She sat with her head drooping, and never lifted her eyes. Her hand lay passive in his.

"It is wicked and dreadful," she said.

"I don't know. I don't think it is. It would be dreadful if we treated it lightly. Just now I feel stunned, and I cannot think connectedly. By to-morrow I shall know how we ought to act."

"It is my fault. It is always the woman who is to blame."

"No, a million times no. If there is blame, it is all mine;" and again he put his arms round her, and held her close against his heart.

Time passed, and the clanging bell of St. Bede's began to sound its ugly note for Evensong. The faithful were being summoned to worship, but one of God's messengers had lost himself. It seemed as if there might be a congregation waiting for a sermon, and no one ready to preach it. Nape would have to read something to them, or Walsden could get up and gossip about the jungle.

But then finally Churchill heard the bell, and sprang to his feet.

"I must leave you now, Lilian. You will hear from me —I will see you—some time to-morrow—or next day at the latest. I'll arrange—I'll plan—I'll decide what is best.

And don't fear, my darling. Be brave now in another way."

And he ran through the streets to the place of his professional duty.

He was just in time to pull on his surplice and to follow Walsden and the choir as they marched out of the vestry.

He performed his part of the service without knowing what he said and scarcely knowing where he was. Then came the sermon, and he had to pull himself together. He tried to conceal all signs of internal trouble and perhaps succeeded. But the words that even remotely implied faith stuck in his throat, and made him stammer and cough. The crisis was over now. He knew that he did not believe; and he seemed to know also, with absolute certainty that he would never believe again on this side of the tomb.

He went straight home to his rooms, and, walking backwards and forwards between the bedroom and the sitting-room, he took off his black coat, then the black waistcoat, then the Roman collar. Beneath there was a grey flannel shirt, and he opened this widely at the neck, as though the stiff white collar had still been there oppressing and chafing him. Then he put on a shabby old Norfolk jacket, and stood looking at the discarded garments as they lay where he had tossed them.

He thought. "They formed the modern, up-to-date garb of slavery and superstition. In that sense they are the Devil's livery, and I vow and swear that I will never wear it again."

Mrs. Clough presently brought him his bread-and-cheese supper, and he ate with appetite. When he went to bed he slept quietly and profoundly. Indeed he had not enjoyed such dreamless, refreshing slumber since that night years and years ago after he had just vowed to give his life to all those things which he had now abandoned for ever.

XXXIV

Churchill was up betimes, and after a hearty breakfast he went into what was called "the old gentleman's room." Mr. Philbrick, who was sitting up in bed and smoking, looked at him with surprise and spoke with affectionate interest.

"I awmost took you for a stranger, sir. Never seen you in *that* costume before."

Churchill was wearing the homespun jacket and a pair of grey flannel trousers, with an old college scarf tied loosely round his neck and a straw hat on the back of his head.

"I'm off for a day's tramp," he said, smiling. "I want to leave the pavements behind me for a few hours, and get among some open fields where one can sit down and think quietly."

"Very nice, too."

"And how are you, Mr. Philbrick?"

"All the better for seeing you, sir. You haven't honoured me much latterly."

"No, I have been very neglectful—but really I couldn't help it."

"Good gracious, no, sir, how could you? I knew that well enough. I says to meself, 'He's up to his eyes in 'is 'oly duties, or he'd give me the pleasure same as he used.' All I meant to say was I've missed our bits of prayer, an' the readin's of them collicks. An' if you felt disposed to favour me now with a minnit or two of it, well——"

"Philbrick, I can't pray with you. I can never pray with you again."

"Is that so?" And Mr. Philbrick took his pipe from his mouth. "Always so busy 'enceforth, sir?"

"No. I may as well tell you the truth. You'd hear it soon enough, anyhow;" and Churchill put his hand on Mr. Philbrick's shoulder and spoke with great earnestness. "I ask, I beg—and I honestly advise that you won't allow this thing to make the slightest difference to *you*. But I can't pray, because the truth is I don't believe in it any more."

"Don't believe no more! Well, I'm blowed. What next? Why not?"

"To me it's unbelievable."

"Too thick, eh? Well, you know that's what I always said. Wants a bit of swallowing! But you was so sure as if you'd been there and seen it all done." The old fellow smoked reflectively; then pointed with the mouthpiece of his pipe and went on talking. "I'm sorry you should be so upset, sir. Dessay it weighs on your mind like. Bound to do, sir;" and as he looked at Churchill his eyes were screwed up so small that they almost disappeared. "Yes, I'm more'n sorry you should be upset."

The old chap was not upset himself. Really, either way, what did it matter? As he used to say, "I like these religious people. They're right. Right all through. Never served you a dirty trick." But he liked the people themselves—for their humanity, polite manners, kindness—and just took their creed on trust. Judge of a tree by its fruit. If the thing was good enough for Mr. Walsden and all the other kind gentlemen, it was good enough for him.

Churchill, rejoicing that his announcement had left Mr. Philbrick so philosophically calm, started on the day's outing. Life and love seemed to call him; all that he had denied to himself seemed to be waiting for him; but he must make plans for the future soberly and methodically. In that smiling future there were two people, and one of them was of infinitely greater importance than the other. He himself felt safe and content; but she was made of more delicate stuff, and happiness that came to her tainted with disgrace might for a time, even for a long time, be only a loosening of the chains and not their breaking. He must act very wisely and cautiously for her sake. Oh, what an idiotic fancy it had been that a beneficent God could take pleasure in priests tormenting themselves and in women remaining wives in homes from which love has long since fled.

He struck northwards, riding on an omnibus as far as it went, then taking a train, eager to shake off the smoke and dust and noise of the town as quickly as he could; and all the way he thought of the weakness of Christ's recorded teaching in relation to life and to love. The preposterous altruism too! If a man takes your coat, give him your cloak. Resist not evil. It is an insane immolation of self —as bad intrinsically as fakirs stabbing themselves or anchorites warping their spines in caves scarcely large enough for a fair-sized dog.

And yet he had preached it to Lilian. There could be no escape from her brute-beast; she was to go back and turn the other cheek to his merciless hand; she was to solace him in his drunkenness, be a submissive slave beneath his cruel blows and his nauseating embraces. Churchill's heart turned sick with pity for her and scorn of himself for telling her to drain the cup of bitterness to the dregs. When she appealed for his aid he had played at being St. Anthony—not tempted of the devil, but driving away an angel who had come to him. To act so was to forget that he was a man. No man would let her go on suffering.

He got out of the train at a roadside station, and, although still only ten or a dozen miles from St. Bede's, found himself apparently in the depths of the country. The sky was clean and high, the odour of the earth was penetratingly sweet, the landscape delighted and refreshed his eyes; and he felt like a man who, after being condemned by his doctors as a hopeless case, is miraculously restored to health and energy.

He lay sunning himself by green hedgerows, strolled through little woods where the light and shadow mingled and made an atmosphere like limpid water, crossed wide commons where the gorse made waves of yellow flame; he listened to the song of larks, watched rabbits playing on the nibbled grass, saturated himself with air and sunlight and incessantly changing beauty. All round him, near and far, life both visible and invisible was active, the whole world was in motion, and heaven swung serenely to its glorious, undeviating rhythm. And all that he saw, all that he imagined of Nature's magnificent panorama—these peaceful summer fields, or winter's darkness or storm, the march of the seasons with seed-time and harvest, black thunderclouds and rainbow arcs, growth, ripeness, and decay—all, all seemed to say to him, "This is, has been, and ever will be the only manifestation made to humankind by what they call God."

The health-giving hours glided by; it was afternoon, and he heard the sound of church bells, rung gaily. Presently he saw the church, a delightful little toy, with a wooden cupola on its squat tower and a mantle of untrimmed ivy hiding its walls. He went down sloping ground towards it, and found a rural scene as pretty as anything in a book or a picture. On one side of the churchyard there were the stretching park-lands of some nobleman's seat, cattle dotted among hawthorns, distant copses, and a ridge of hills all vague and melting in the sunlight; on the other side one had a glimpse of a quite adorable village, with old houses and gardens set far back from a white roadway that culminated in an open green. And across the green and along the dusty road came villagers in their Sunday best, two and two, carrying nosegays, like the chorus people of a comic opera. It was a rustic wedding.

Churchill went into the church and watched the ceremony.

Only the bride believed *really*. No one else in all the church. You could hear it in their voices. The parson, a nice old fellow, had humanity and infinite kindness in his tone as he talked to them, speaking the sacred words; but no belief. Neither he nor any one else believed. Only in the bride's eyes and her shy whisper was there the true childlike belief; and Churchill thought, "She *is* a child. This crowning of her love is to her of such infinite importance that there is nothing unbelievable in the notion of God Himself desiring to be present at the ceremony. She takes the whole thing with desperate seriousness. But the others are all easy and jovial—thinking about the good fare that is soon to be eaten, about the hired fly, about anything."

And indeed, he thought, as he studied the faces, would it not be absurd to expect any sign of real belief? How could they come trooping in so comfortably, if for a moment they believed that it was God's house; that here, in this frail structure, was lodged the mysterious force that governs and controls surrounding nature, that created the universe and supplies the power that keeps it in motion? He thought of such people in an electric power-house, the engine-room of an Atlantic liner, or even in a small village saw-mill. Look at them now, and as a contrast imagine their aspect and demeanour under those other conditions, when they *do* believe in the power—when they *know* that, hidden but terribly near, the death-dealing force is really there. They would scarcely venture in at the door; they would not budge, they would not dare to breathe freely, because of their fear and awe and wonder. And that is just how they would act here, in this power-house, if for a moment they believed.

His mind steadied itself during the long silent day. He ate a little food towards evening, when sadness had returned to the air; and as he walked home, already—like the busy insect that must build again each time that its stronghold is destroyed—he was shaping something from the wreck of the old thoughts.

Altruism—yes, but rational altruism. Pity for others; much love for others; the golden rule—with manly limitations. Do as you would be done by. Don't ask too much from others, or want others to do more than as a responsible man you ought to ask; and be sure that you need not do it yourself, should they ask you.

Not materialism. That is impossible. We have lived beyond it. The lamp and the mirror in each man render it impossible. Till the mirror showed one one's spiritual self, selfishness as of the beasts that do not know themselves was still possible. But when the lamp-flame began to be fed with thought and memory made the mirror, intangible things were not less real than solid substance; to-day could no longer wipe out yesterday; remorse became as deadly as death itself. What the mirror shows must be fair to look on, or we cannot be happy.

He had been upon his feet for many hours, but he walked without any sense of fatigue. He was strong and free. He was a sick man come to life again; he had burst the death shrouds of superstition, escaped from the thought-tomb, and returned to the light of day. He felt no fear and no regret; he was troubled by no doubt even. He would never feel that in abandoning his religious faith he had also lost his ethical guide; he needed nothing beyond that which was left to him; he could trust to the Mirror and the Lamp.

The evening wore on, and it was as dark as it would be between now and dawn. Nothing in the landscape was hidden, but all objects had changed; greyness and mystery threw veils upon the commonest things and made them fine. As he climbed over high ground and a wide view opened out before him, he was struck by the fantastic aspect of this northward approach to London. He looked down upon strangely-shaped mounds and holes that one might have imagined to be the work of giants; and soon the giants' playthings could be vaguely distinguished—the black round entrance of a tunnel, little trains with red tail-lights, viaducts, signal lanterns. Further on there were gasometers, water towers, a network of broadening railways; all beautiful and fantastic in the summer night, with white smoke like fallen clouds that flashed into flame and faded; while deep down in shadowy roadways the trams resembled lamplit houses rolling away from their foundations, or if one saw their dorsal fin, reminded one of golden fish gliding in black water. Far ahead the vast town illuminated the sky—a sleepless, flaming city over which night itself may not hover. And above the widespread fiery glow, to be felt rather than seen, an illimitable void—the pathless tracts of space; worlds without end, purposely scattered with ordered plan, or brushed like seed pearls and never missed from the embroidered skirts of measureless majesty; solar systems mightier than our own, millions of them, each narrowed to one small speck of feeble radiance, to serve as guiding points by which our mortal souls may wing their way towards the heavenly home? Is it not palpably childish?

And once more he thought of the doctrine of the Atonement. Ants might have entertained some such vainglorious dream—say the biggest of ant-heaps eating the flesh from the bones of a dead man, with their tiny myriad teeth picking a skeleton bare and white in the sunshine, and thinking, "This god came down on earth amongst us and we devoured him." But that men—not ants—should thus vaingloriously dream!

After another mile or two he had reached the outskirts of the town; and here he got into a tram and rode for the rest of the way home. It was not yet eleven o'clock, and before going to bed he determined to write to his vicar.

> "My Dear Walsden:
>
> "For some time I have ceased to believe in the Christian revelation, and now I have no choice but to tell you that, etc., etc."

A difficult communication—because he knew that it would cause pain to a man of whom he was genuinely fond; but it had to be made now without further delay; and soon he had finished writing, and had sealed the envelope that contained it. He thought he would carry it round to the vicarage and leave it there—a bombshell for poor old Walsden's breakfast-table to-morrow morning; and he would have done this, had not the housekeeper come upstairs to ask if he had seen the letter from Mrs. Vickers that was waiting for him on the mantelpiece.

"You came in so quiet I didn't hear you," said Mrs. Clough. "There it is. She said you was to have it at once."

"How long ago?"

"About an hour. She came mid-day, and I told her you was gone for the day. Then she was here again this evening and seemed dreadful upset at not finding you—so I let her write at your desk. I asked her if it was anything I could do—with the tickets or what not; but she said it was you she wanted to speak to."

"All right. I'll attend to it."

The letter was simply a cry for help. She said that her husband returned unexpectedly yesterday afternoon. He was displeased by her absence; he forced her to confess that she had been with Churchill; he became angry—and he had ill-treated her worse than ever.

Churchill rushed downstairs and out of the house. He did not have another thought of Walsden, of his determination to conduct matters cautiously, of the necessity of avoiding scandal. He was wild with rage; and if he thought at all, it was of how most swiftly he could reach that far-off house that held the woman he loved and the man who had been knocking her about.

XXXV

Lamplight showed from the two windows of their living-room. Churchill, who had run for the last half-mile, stood close to the windows listening while he recovered breath. He heard the man's voice, a deep-toned growl at intervals, and he felt sure that Lilian was there also.

"My sweetheart," he said to himself, "did you think I had deserted you?"

Then he rang the door-bell, keeping his finger on the button so that the bell rang unceasingly till the door was opened.

"Hullo," said the master of the house angrily. "What the deuce do you mean?—Oh, it's *you*, is it? This is a queer hour to——"

"Where's your wife?" said Churchill. Pushing back the door, he had entered the hall, and he turned to the two steps that led down to the large room. "Lilian, are you there? Lilian, I have come to you."

Vickers gave an oath and followed him. "Who the devil authorised you to call her Lilian? Look here, my friend, you and I will have to understand each other. Yes, by God—and about time too."

"I'll talk to you directly," said Churchill. "We'll have an understanding. Yes, I'll tell you what I want of you directly." He spoke in a curiously artificial manner, his tone rather high-pitched and hurried, finding it difficult to select his words, and so preoccupied with thought of Lilian that everything said by her husband seemed for the moment worrying and irrelevant.

There was a lamp on the piano, and another on the central table. The table was covered with account books and papers, and here Lilian had been sitting, hard at work, it seemed, as secretary or amanuensis for her husband. She stood now close to the table, trembling, with her hands pressed to her bosom.

Churchill went straight to her, put his arm round her waist, and gently drew her from the table towards the door. "Get your hat and jacket," he whispered, "and wait for me in the hall. I couldn't come before. My darling, I was late—your letter was waiting for me. It's all right now. I have come—at last. Just get your hat, and wait for me out there."

But she clung to him, terrified. Her husband barred the way.

"Stand aside," said Churchill.

"Are you mad?" said Vickers.

"Let her pass, I tell you;" and Churchill began to stammer. "I—I—suppose you, you, don't think it necessary for her to hear all I—I'm going to say to you."

"No," said Vickers, with another oath, and he stood aside. "Lilian, you may go. Yes, you are to go upstairs to bed. Go to bed at once;" and he put his hands in his pockets, moved across to the table, and sat down.

"Of course you're not to go to bed," said Churchill. "Go up and fetch your hat if it's up there, Lilian. Then wait outside the door." And then he saw her face in the full light that fell upon it from the lamp on the piano. Her eyelids were swollen by much weeping, her lips quivered and twitched, and it seemed to him that he saw a tell-tale mark—a broad reddened patch on the white face. The man had hit her perhaps with his open hand—or the back of his hand—as they sat at the table, while she was humbly slaving for him. Obviously it had not been a blow from the fist. No, just a buffet, a smack on the cheek—a hint or reminder of more serious punishment.

And, at the sight of this mark, Churchill was swept over the final outermost boundaries of reasoned thought, and dropped far down into the region of simple primitive instinct. He did not know what next he would say or do. Hence onward for some time the words and the acts bubbled forth spontaneously. His voice was another person's, and he heard it with a deep throb of satisfaction. What the voice said was fine, exactly what he would have wished it to say had he been prompting it with the utmost care.

"Yes, now for our little understanding." He had swung round on his heel and was back near the table, stooping down that he might stare into the wrathful glitter of his enemy's eyes.

"Well, what do you want of me?"

"I want your wife of you; and I mean to take her."

"I'll not let any—parson come between me and my wife."

"I'm not a—parson. I'm a man, and I'm going to see which is the better man, you or I."

Lilian had not left the room. She stood on the upper step of the doorway, looking at them, talking to them, uttering implorations that were like cries. So far as Churchill was concerned, she had temporarily ceased to exist; he did not hear her, he was not aware that she remained within sight and sound; but now, terrified, desperate, she came down the steps and clung to him again.

"Take me away before he prevents you. For God's sake don't stay any longer. You don't know what he is. He'll kill you. Oh, come now."

Churchill shook his arm free, dragged her with him to the door, and pushed her through it into the hall. Then he shut the door in her face, and bolted it. Finding the bolt ready on the door was relief and joy. She was feebly beating against the other side of the door and wailing and calling; but she could not interrupt him. Once more she ceased to exist. He and his enemy were alone.

He stood in front of Vickers, looking at his eyes, his great neck and shoulders, and the stubble on his ugly glistening jowl; feeling an ecstasy of anger and hatred, and rejoicing in these sensations; glad that he hated with such intensity, drawing comfort and ease from the fiery rage.

"Look here," said Vickers, without moving from his chair, "I think you must have gone mad."

"No, I have come to my senses."

"Well, I'm not going to fight with you—unless you force me; but, so help me, if I do——"

"Yes, you'll fight," said Churchill. "I'll force you—you dirty blackguard." And there was keen delight, an exaltation as of strong drink, in the words—the words of that common voice of instinct that needs no prompting. "You can hit your wife. Well, hit me. You hit her face just now. You dog—like that;" and he hit him with his open hand. "Like that," and he hit him again across the lips. The feel of the man's gross flesh beneath his hand sent thrills of delight through and through his brain.

Next instant they were at it hammer and tongs, blind with fury, not guarding or dodging, giving themselves to the rapture of battle as completely as two wild beasts could have done.

Thus they fought, fiercely and badly, in such a hunger to get at each other closer and closer that neither allowed himself a chance of doing real work. The room was large, and yet they seemed to be using the whole floor space as alternately they pressed their attacks; furniture was being knocked over, though they still kept on their feet; a fallen chair was a danger that both understood and automatically avoided. And throughout the noise of these first rough bouts the woman outside the door continued to wail and beat the panels. They did not hear her: she might have been a thousand miles away. Her turn was not yet. She had set two males to fight for her, and she must wait until it should be decided to which of the two she would henceforth belong.

But soon the fight improved in quality; the wildness had begun to spend itself; they were introducing a little more method, and shaping for better things. Churchill still slogged away rather wildly, craving always for the face, neglecting easy openings to the body, in his excitement not feeling any of the blows that he himself received; and of a sudden he was sent staggering, would have fallen but for the table.

The lamp, too, was nearly knocked down, and Churchill, getting round the table, lifted it from its perilous situation and carried it to a window ledge. Vickers did not interfere with him, and suffered him also to pull away the table unmolested. He stood panting a bit, but meaning much mischief, and perhaps thinking that Churchill had had almost enough.

"Yes," he growled, "but you don't go—*now.* I've not done with you."

"No, I've not done with you either."

And they went for each other again.

The man was much heavier, as well as two inches taller;

whenever he could turn his weight and power to account at the same time he would be terribly dangerous; but Churchill was hitting fast and hard, he was younger, he was certainly better on his legs. He had begun to use his feet properly; every time he landed on the face now it was a stinger. And Vickers was feeling the sting. His lower lip was bleeding and bothering him, an eye blinked spasmodically, and his right ear had been nastily wiped. Stung again and more acutely, he gave a roar of rage, rushed in, grappled Churchill tightly and overbore him. Down they both went, Churchill underneath.

They were on the floor for minutes, Churchill underneath all the time. There was no referee, no seconds, no audience of amateurs, no ring to be broken into by indignant partisans; the lamps burned clearly and steadily; and the woman outside the door, more frightened by the silence than by the noise, made pitiful cries. Just what one might expect in the circumstances was happening. Vickers tried to finish there and then; he pounded as hard as he could at such close range, raised himself and dropped again with all his weight, wanted to smother, crush, and mangle. And Churchill suffered the most deadly anxiety for as long as it lasted, thinking coherently throughout his helpless struggles, but never losing courage even when most exhausted. "This is my own fault," he thought; "but I'll lick him all the same. . . . Ah, you'd like to crack my skull, wouldn't you? Only I know how to tuck in my twopenny, old boy." But he felt as if his ribs were broken, his neck dislocated, and his heart being beaten on with a red-hot hammer. Perhaps because Vickers tired, perhaps because he thought the game was all his own, he unexpectedly found the position reversed. Churchill was on top of him, was getting free, and next moment a bent arm blow on the jaw won complete release.

Churchill was on his feet again, out of breath, waiting. Vickers, up again, allowed no pauses, went for him with another rush. But he was weaker, much weaker; it was fierceness of intention with very little else behind it; and Churchill felt certain that it would be all right now. He began to spar for wind—dodging away, slipping by and crossing the room, tiring his man, leading him a devil's dance. And almost subconsciously, at any rate without loss of concentrated attention, he continued to think. Old days in the gymnasium at St. Martyr's, the priceless wisdom of Sergeant Miller, readings and broodings on historical prize-fights—all available mental material seemed to be aiding him, without hampering or confusing him. As once before, many years ago—but in play, not in earnest that time—thought and action blended, and the whole force of his mind entered into the smallest movements of his body. So that when rapidly and cautiously he steered clear of a loose mat that perhaps might have slid upon the floor, his very feet seemed to applaud and approve, saying to him, "That's right. You can't be too careful. Just take your time. If you don't slip, or otherwise make a fool of yourself, this man is beat to the world."

Then, with recovered wind, he began really hitting once more; patiently waiting his chance, and taking it with all his strength; glorying in the shock of the good blow as his fist landed full on the face and the man went down beneath it—went down again and again. It was becoming easy now. The man got up and came on, but only for another dose of similar efficacy. The man's face was like a large grotesque mask that he had put on to frighten children at a tea-party; the injured eye had nearly closed in a permanent wink; the red moustache protruded ridiculously over the cut and swollen lips, and these nasty side fangs displayed themselves in what appeared to be an unchanging villainous grin. And the huge loutish wearer of the mask cut sorry capers, as if to make the grown-up people laugh, pirouetting absurdly, stumbling, sitting down hurriedly, getting up slowly.

Churchill talked to him. "Take that. This is our understanding. Do you understand? There! Understand *that?*"

It was easier and easier. No need for hurry now. A few more minutes—why hurry them through? The man was bleeding, snorting, helpless—groaning under his punishment. His breath came with a whistling sigh each time you hit him on the body, with a gasping sob when you hit him in the face. At last he was down and could not get up. After a lapse of consciousness he slowly and painfully scrambled to his knees; then he sank again, subsided on his face, moaning, and feebly guarding his head against the boot work that he dreaded might now begin.

Churchill, satisfied, stood looking down at him with exultant smiling scorn, and did not feel one touch of pity, although absolutely all the hatred had gone. "Long has he asked for it," said that terrible voice of unflinching instinct, "and now the most captious critics would admit he has had it."

Then with a shrug and a laugh he turned away, and went to unbolt the door.

"Lilian, it's all right."

She was half fainting, almost distraught, and at sight of him she recoiled with such horror in her eyes that one might have believed that the opened door showed her a destiny she had been praying to avoid, that the wrong man had won, that she preferred the tyrant to the rescuer. In truth Edward Churchill was not pretty to see. He, too, was blood-stained, battered.

"Lilian, take heart. What's the matter? Oh, you haven't got your hat. Get your hat, dear. We'll be off now."

Then he went into the kitchen behind the hall, carrying one of the lamps with him. Out there he washed his face and hands in the sink, and dried them on a roller towel.

"Now," he said, "perhaps it will be safer to put out the lamps. We can't be far off daylight."

Lilian had crept down the steps. She was supporting herself against the piano, looking at the prostrate form, with wild eyes, her teeth chattering, her whole body shaking.

"Come," said Churchill.

"Is he dying?"

"Dying? No;" and he laughed contemptuously. "He has had the thrashing he deserved—that's all."

"But I can't leave him lying there like that."

"Rubbish. He's as well there as anywhere else. . . . He can find his way upstairs when he pleases. . . . Why haven't you fetched your hat? Never mind."

Then he put out the lamps, took her by the hand, and led her away.

The night trams had ceased running, the morning trams had not yet started; but outside Poplar railway station he begged a lift in a dock wagon, and so they rode for a part of their journey. When they reached St. Bede's the streets were grey and silver with the light of dawn, and they walked slowly side by side, he holding her hand as in the dream. The dream had come true. He had got her now, and neither God, the world, nor the devil should ever take her away from him.

At Denmark House he asked her if he should rouse the housekeeper, but she said no.

"Very well," he said. "This, of course, is a shock to you. But it is perfectly all right. It saves endless bother and delay. I am very glad it has worked out just as it has. You will be glad too. Now act sensibly. Lie down on the bed and try to sleep for a few hours." He had led her into his bedroom, and was arranging the bed for her with a traveling rug and the counterpane to keep her warm. "I shall be close by in the other room—quite near you—guarding you. If you are frightened—if you want anything—call to me." Then he took her cold white face between his bruised hands, and tenderly, reverently, kissed her forehead. "Good-night, my darling. To-morrow we will go away. To-morrow our life begins."

XXXVI

Next morning he took her a little way westward to shops where they were able to procure all the things that were necessary, her trousseau, as he called it, and a bridegroom's suit of blue serge for himself. She was crushed in spirit, still horror-stricken by the fight, but he told her to be of good heart, that love knows no law; and the business of shopping lightened her sense of woe.

"You like this, Lilian? It's fun, isn't it?"

"I like it," she said, "because it makes me feel that I am with you for ever."

"Oh, yes," he said. "It's for ever—so long as we both shall live."

Then in the afternoon they went by train from King's Cross to the village he had visited yesterday. Only yesterday, yet it seemed years ago. He had noticed a cottage with a board inviting lodgers, and he went straight from the station to this cottage. It was all so easy. Rooms for his wife and himself? Oh, yes, why not? Twenty minutes after their arrival they were sitting at tea in the parlour, looking through the open window, watching the daughter of the house, aged six, drive three rebellious cows into a paddock across the white road, and laughing because two old ladies—Londoners obviously—were terrified by the cows, and ran for shelter to a garden gate. When they strolled out after tea they met their luggage in a farm cart, the little cow-driving child sedately established by the farm labourer's side. She had been sent to the station to fetch the new lodgers' brand new cane boxes. She assisted her mother in house, stable, and garden. Lilian soon made the child's acquaintance. By supper time they both felt that the village was their home.

Here, then, for a few days they were perfectly, idyllically happy. The clean air filled their lungs, the kind sun warmed their veins, the soft nights brought them dreamless sleep. All that there is in love—the peace of love that passes all understanding—Edward Churchill tasted then. They were the days which never return, the days for which so many wait a lifetime in vain.

Once they wandered into the churchyard, and he told her of the wedding party he had seen there. Presently they entered the church, and she stood with him at the chancel steps looking at the altar. Then she gave him a little ring that he knew had been her mother's and asked him to put it on her finger, where till now she had worn her wedding ring.

"Say it," she whispered. "Say it here, before God, that it is for ever."

He said it, and, looking at her, saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"As long as we both shall live. . . . Say it."

And he said this also.

She whispered more words from the marriage service—whispered them to herself rather than to him, and then she went back to the front pew, knelt, and prayed.

He went out into the churchyard and waited for her. After a considerable time she came out, her face bright, with the sunlight on it, as she threaded her way through the graves to the low wall where he was sitting; and he saw in her eyes the same look that had been in the eyes of the bride. She, too, believed that God was in the church listening to all those words.

They sat on the wall, and, while he remained content with the present golden hours, she already spoke of the future—of the time when Robert Vickers should have set her free and the Church could bless their union.

"Lilian, do such thoughts spoil your happiness?"

"Oh, no, but I shall be happier when there is no need for the thoughts. . . . It will save difficulties. . . . Suppose we ever had a child."

"I hope we shall."

"So do I, when we are really married. How long will it take—at the quickest—for him to divorce me?"

"A long time. A year—I dare say."

"You had some more letters this morning?"

"Yes, from Walsden, from Gardiner, and the others—they are all writing to me." He got up and stretched himself. "I am to be excommunicated, put outside the pale," and he laughed rather bitterly. "But Walsden will try to let me down as lightly as he can."

"He did not say what Robert is doing—or what he intends to do?"

"No. We shall hear soon enough from Mr. Robert Vickers himself. He knows where I am."

Lilian looked frightened.

"How can he have found out?"

"I wrote and told him."

Before leaving London Churchill had written a second letter to Walsden, a supplement to his disclosure of loss of faith. He stated his conviction that in rescuing Lilian from the brute who misused her he had followed the only course open to him. He added an expression of his hope that Vickers would at once institute proceedings for a divorce; he should not, of course, offer any defence; he was ready to pay damages to his last farthing. Naturally, his paramount desire now was to regularise the position of Lilian by making her his legal wife.

Walsden, replying, said very simply that he would rather have suffered the loss of a leg or an arm than that this thing should have happened. However, he could never forget all that Churchill had done for the parish; he himself felt, and he believed that the authorities would feel, that as far as possible Churchill's disastrous escapade should be passed over in silence. For the good of the many, as well as for the good of the few, scandal should be avoided. Much harm, perhaps irreparable harm, would be wrought if the affair became a public scandal.

As Churchill foretold, they had not long to wait before hearing from Vickers. He wrote asking Churchill to go to see him at noon on the morrow for the purpose of talking things over. He said that he had so far done nothing; he would do nothing until he had seen Churchill.

"But you won't go?"

"Oh, yes, I must go. I'll telegraph at once to say I'll be with him at twelve."

Lilian was afraid—terrified. She implored Edward to refuse the interview. It was not safe. He did not know the wickedness of the man.

"He doesn't mean to release me," she sobbed. "He will try to get me back. Don't go near him—never see him again."

But Edward was determined to keep the appointment. She could not dissuade him, and after a while she ceased to try. She insisted, however, on going to London with him next day, and, pale and trembling, was left to wait for him at King's Cross Station.

"How long do you think you will be?"

"Three hours—at the outside."

He told her to fill in the time with a little more shopping, and then meet him in the Station Refreshment Room. "Wait for me there—if I am late. Get something to eat. I'm sure to be back by two o'clock."

He did not return. She waited for him, but he did not come at two o'clock or three o'clock. The cruel hours passed, and still he did not come. Then, in an agony of dread, but with love conquering all fear for herself, she set out towards the east, towards her husband's house.

Edward Churchill, as he approached the house, had noticed some men of the dock-labourer class standing idly in the street; a knot of them were in the passage by the hoarding, and one moved away from Vickers's front door as he drew near. It was a little before noon. The door stood open, and Vickers himself was on the threshold of the inner room.

"Come in here. You're up to time—so much the better."

The blinds were drawn, and Vickers seated himself at the table with his back towards the windows, so that one could scarcely see his hated face. Edward guessed that the man was trying to hide the traces of the punishment he had received, and he attributed the change in the man's voice—a grumbling muffled tone—to the swollen state of his injured lips. He had moved slowly and heavily, as if still very stiff.

"Now," he said, "you'll be good enough to hear my views, and then you can go—the sooner, the better I shall be pleased. First, about my wife——"

"She's my wife now, Vickers."

"Oh, no, my friend—and what's more, she never will be your wife." In spite of the semi-darkness of the room, or as one grew more accustomed to it, one could now see the vindictive passion of the man's whole aspect. He spoke slowly, endeavouring to give each word its full weight, as though reciting words that he had prepared and learnt beforehand.

"I have not charged you for assault in a police court, but you shall pay me for all. I shan't go for divorce—as your late parson-friends advise me. She is my wife, and I'll have her back. Yes, whether you like it or not, that's how it's going to be. Tell her so from me, and lay your own plans accordingly. . . . That's what I've had you here to tell you."

"Vickers, you'll change your mind."

"Never."

"Yes, you'll think things over, and come to a wiser frame of mind. If you like, I'll own I have wronged you to this extent, that——"

"Oh, how condescending—how like a parson! But I thought you had given up the preaching game."

"I say, I own I have robbed you of your wife. You didn't value her. She didn't love you. You didn't care for her. You had forfeited all claim upon her. Then why try to make her suffer? She, at any rate, is not to blame for——"

"I have told you what I mean to do and what I don't mean to do. That's all. You can go."

"Very well," said Churchill. "But I am sure you will change your mind. You are sore and angry now. Just think it out quietly. It's for your own comfort as well as ours. Give us freedom and take freedom yourself. You'll easily get another wife to bully and knock about again."

"Have you finished?"

"Yes. I have finished with you. But remember my advice. And remember this too. If you dare to molest her, if you ever venture to interfere with her in the very slightest degree, I'm ready and eager to protect her."

He had come close and he stood looking down at Vickers, who sat quite still looking up at him.

"All right," said Vickers. "I've listened to you patiently. But when all's said and done, I'll have her back. Yes, I'll have her back in my own way, at my own time."

Churchill went out into the sunlight from the darkened room; and Vickers, following him to the front door, stood there, to watch his visitor till he disappeared round the corner of the narrow side street, and then to listen. He saw no more; but in a moment confused shoutings told him that the trap he had laid was working properly. Churchill had fallen into the hands of the Union men, who might be trusted to avenge the outraged honour of their secretary.

There were eighteen or twenty of them, and they fell upon the victim with savage fury, using sticks and bars, fists and feet, all together, in the best style; giving him no shadow of a chance; almost killing him, when once they got him down, kicking him like a football. It was all over in a minute. Then some one took alarm, some one thought he heard a whistle, a cry arose that the police were coming; and the men ran this way, that way, through the passages, along the streets. One heard their footsteps; then the whole place was empty and silent.

Robert Vickers went back into his house and closed the door behind him.

When after a little while two policemen came through the passage by the hoarding, they found Churchill lying on his back, bleeding, insensible, battered, with outstretched arms like St. Stephen or another of the martyrs. He was picked up, put upon a wheeled stretcher, and taken to the small hospital at Poplar—a bad case, three ribs and one forearm broken, dreadful head wounds—a really bad case, the doctors said. Horrible to see, even when the doctors and nurses had set him, trussed him, bound him, plastered him—a bundle picked up from the battle-field, with faint life still showing.

Lilian found him in the evening, and was allowed to remain at the hospital all through the night.

Before reaching her husband's house she had heard from people in the neighbourhood of "the accident," and did not for a moment doubt who was its victim. A tall, nicely dressed gentleman, they said, had been "done in" and taken away on an ambulance, but no one could say to what hospital. "Prob'ly the London. . . . Yes, you may be sure, the London. . . . Anyways try the London fust." From the London she was sent to St. Catherine's, and then back to Poplar.

XXXVII

He was between life and death for a fortnight; then it was said that he would certainly recover, and soon he was making good progress. But the progress seemed very slow.

This time was most dreadful for Lilian. Thrown on her own resources and almost penniless, she maintained herself and paid the rent of a wretched room near the hospital by working as a charwoman, sempstress, anything. In a moment she had dropped to the level of the casual labourer. At the hospital people were kind to her, but they were unable to help her, and it was painfully obvious that they did not approve of her. Outside in the open streets she went in deadly apprehension. Her husband lay in wait for her, stopped her and harangued her. He came to the hospital itself and gave the authorities his version of her history, posed as the injured but magnanimous husband, willing still to forgive and take her back to the desolated home. He had no fear now of her protector.

Gently but firmly the good folk tackled her. They tried to persuade her to return to the man she had wronged. Now was the time, while her lover lay unconscious; or now when he had been pronounced as out of immediate danger. They could all detect the hand of God visibly working. It was a judgment on Edward Churchill—and on her too.

Each time that she went to Edward's bedside she ran the gauntlet of such advice and admonition.

The hospital nurses were divided in opinion as to whether she ought or ought not to adopt the advice, and they enjoyed discussion of the question either with her or merely among themselves; but most of them were agreed that it would be a good thing for their patient if she could be definitely shaken off before he got upon his legs again.

"I can't see anything in her to justify making such a fuss about."

"You don't think her pretty? No, on the whole, I don't think I do either. She's what you'd call an elegant woman, if she was properly dressed; but she's too pasty-faced for my fancy."

This criticism was offered by a fine, bouncing, full-blooded nurse.

"But she's a good plucked one," said another nurse. "Yes, I do give her that credit. She hasn't played the fine lady. Sister says she works all day at the boot place in Green Street."

Edward did not know till later of the ordeal through which she had passed; but, gradually gaining strength, he began to understand some of her difficulties with regard to money, and soon was able to remove them. He was the proud possessor of an income of two pounds a week, but he had by recent expenditure forestalled this. His banking account was overdrawn. Nevertheless, with Lilian's aid, he sent a letter to the Bank asking to be allowed to overdraw a little more; and the Bank said, Yes, a *very* little more. He also sent a letter to his mother, explaining that he was rather ill, and appealing for a loan of a hundred pounds.

Mrs. Churchill sent him fifty pounds, with apologies for only going half way to meet his wishes, but life at Brighton was not cheap, and she had so many unexpected claims. She herself was not in very good health, and she hoped that her "ever dear Edward" would soon be better.

Anyhow the money difficulty was at an end. Lilian need work no more at the boot place; she could take some of her wardrobe out of pawn, and sit by his bedside as long as the nurses would allow her. And there would be sufficient funds to take them to the seaside for his convalescence, before they started life again in earnest.

When the patient grew stronger the good folk tackled him in his turn, and, as his state improved, their pressure became heavier and heavier.

He must not dream of living with her again. If her husband refused to set her free, he must renounce all companionship with her. If the husband decided to divorce her, then he must wait until the decree was made absolute.

He could not possibly intend to set up housekeeping with another man's wife.

"I consider her as my wife," he said feebly. "She *is* my wife."

"How can you say that?"

"I believe it. It is common sense."

"She is not your wife in the eyes of God."

"She is in the eyes of all sensible people."

"Will you read a little book I have brought for you? See, I am leaving it here within reach. Will you, later on, just stretch out your hand, open the book, and read it quietly?"

"I can't promise."

"Oh, *do* promise. Promise me at least to glance through it. I am sure it will arrest your attention."

"All right. I'll try."

"Thank you. Now I must be going. But I'll come back again. Thursday is my regular day."

It was terrible to him to be thus tackled by a large strange lady—an opulent middle-aged lady, an influential supporter and regular visitor of the hospital. He who had taught and then renounced teaching now lay at the mercy of any of the most preposterous of teachers.

Walsden had hoped that scandal might be avoided, but, alas, the scandal was rampant. Everybody here knew everything about it. It was a subject for debate upstairs, downstairs, in the wash-house and the yard. Their poor little drama was explained and published to all-comers. They themselves had become public property; the whole ward owned them; each bed and each bed's visitors had the right to look at them, think about them, talk about them. They would have been more to themselves if they had camped on the platform of a big London terminus. Very irksome to an innately, a shrinkingly modest woman and a high-spirited but woefully sick man.

Yet everybody was kind to them, everybody meant to be kind. Mr. and Mrs. Walsden came often to see him; Mr. and Mrs. Verschoyle came; Gardiner and Nape came alternately. They brought him sad smiles, friendly pats on the shoulder, gentle squeezes of the hand; they brought him flowers, and biscuits and fruit till the hospital forbade this extra diet; they brought him news of the old parish, illustrated papers, and a miniature chess board—above all else, they brought him counsel, spoken and implied. They were all so kind, but they nearly killed him with their kindness.

Representatives of the police often came to see him. The police had the whole tale at their fingers' ends, and they said they were almost ready to pounce on the miscreants who had attacked him, if only he would assist them properly. They and his other friends were most anxious that these men should be punished.

But he would not help by supplying information which might be of use in fixing the guilt on the right men. He said, "No. It was one man really. That is, I gave one man a thrashing, and he got twenty men to thrash me. Well, we are quits now. I am content to leave it at that."

The police—and especially an inspector who had known and liked Churchill for three years—were distressed by this attitude of mind. Crime is crime, and it is against the public interest that criminals should go unpunished. They thought that Churchill should sacrifice any fantastic private inclinations and help them to get ahead with their business. They promised to bring Vickers to book when they had polished off his gang of bravoes.

Vickers—as the inspector reported—was carrying things with a high hand. He boldly asserted that he knew nothing whatever about the assault. Mr. Churchill left his house, and he shut the door and saw no more. He did not pretend to be sorry—far from it; he said he wished the assailants had killed Mr. Churchill; but it was absurd to suggest that they had been egged on by him, or to attempt to create any link between them and him. They did not belong to his union; they were in no way connected with his union. They were just a lot of "rough customers," who no doubt went for Churchill in order to snatch his watch or purse, but were startled before they could take the booty. "Rubbish," said Vickers truculently, in reply to police innuendoes.

But the inspector, for his part, said he knew such things about the shady antecedents of Vickers that he could bring the gentleman up with a round turn at any minute.

"Leave it alone," Churchill repeated wearily.

However, the disappointed police inspector proved a useful friend eventually. A month and a half had passed, it was towards the end of July, when a sadly cruel scene was enacted in the ward.

One afternoon Vickers came to the hospital and demanded an interview with his wife. He would take no refusal; he knew that his wife was in the building, for he had followed her and seen her enter it; he had come to claim her once for all and to take her away with him. Perhaps he had been drinking, but, at any rate, he was loud of voice and resolute of air, somewhat scaring the matron, and only consenting to remain in a waiting-room for five minutes, during which time his wife must be sent down to him.

Upstairs in the ward there were several visitors, and when Lilian was beckoned away from Churchill's bed two or three of them took her in hand, urged her to go at once to her husband and listen patiently to his appeal. It was, of course, her true duty to depart with him, wherever he might wish to lead her; but it would be downright wickedness to decline to see him.

She, poor soul, worn out and overwrought, wept, wrung her hands, begged them to get rid of Vickers by any means and prevent Edward from knowing that he had come. Then from below came suddenly the sound of the brute's voice. Five minutes had elapsed, and he was storming and blustering to a couple of doctors. And Lilian, terrified, losing her head, ran back to Edward, flung herself down at the bedside, imploring all to protect her.

"Don't take me from him. For God's sake have pity and let me stay with him."

Edward Churchill struggled up in his bed, burst a bandage, and the blood gushed forth from his wounds.

This episode was the climax of the scandal. It caused a stoppage of work in the hospital for quite half an hour; the staircase and the hall were full of excited talk long after the doctors had persuaded Mr. Vickers to go. "Oh, he *is* a beast. . . . No, I don't blame her now. . . . Yes, she's right to stick to the other, now she's got him." The adverse nurses changed their opinion after a glimpse of the deserted husband, and henceforth had more sympathetic thoughts for Lilian.

After this a strong, kind doctor interposed his authority, and made the case his own. He obliterated the good folk altogether, telling them in effect: "I cannot discuss morality or conventions. The woman is necessary for the case. I cannot answer for the recovery of my patient if he is worried by the absence of the woman."

He talked, too, to Edward Churchill, advising him not to be foolish, but to turn the police on to the husband. "They'll draw his teeth or muzzle him somehow."

So the inspector was sent for, and the three of them debated the matter. The inspector was delighted. He would see the man, frighten him, and offer him a bargain. He would say, unofficially, "We have a grand old rod in pickle for you, and we will use it. We will go for you if you give us any more of your nonsense. But if you'll let us alone, we'll let you alone. You have your remedy in the Divorce Court, and if you're sensible you'll take your remedy."

Churchill did not like it, but he was too weak to oppose it, and the doctor and the inspector both said it was absolutely quite all right.

The inspector was successful. Vickers swore vengeance still, but he attempted no further molestation. Week after week slipped by, and there was something like comfort at the sick bed. Lilian sat there, holding her loved one's hand in hers, and often they talked hopefully of the future.

The world was wide and open before them. All this fuss and talk might be considered as purely local; outside the slightly larger circle of life touched by the small circle of St. Bede's parish, nobody had heard of their adventures or would care twopence how the adventures ended. Edward Churchill, an obscure priest, had been inhibited, unfrocked, turned out of the Church, however unflatteringly the fact might be described. But the fact itself was without importance, so completely devoid of general interest that it would not justify a small type paragraph in an evening paper. Truly, as Lilian said so hopefully, they could make a fresh start and drop all the past behind them.

Nevertheless, probably because his weakness induced depression of spirits, he had bitter thoughts sometimes in regard to their present position and the failure that he had made of his life. His friends had all wanted to let him down lightly. This he understood, and too plainly he could put himself at their point of view. Deprived of the help of palliative phrases, he was just a clergyman who had disgraced himself and brought disgrace on those connected with him by chucking everything and running off with another man's wife. And in consequence he had been kicked out by the ruling body of his profession. What's the good of talking about high aims when a solicitor gets struck off the rolls, a soldier forfeits his commission, or a tavern-keeper has his license taken away? He thought with great bitterness that no one could be expected ever properly to comprehend how and why he had reached this catastrophe. Even those who loved him best must lose all trust in him. The harm of his example would not only render more difficult the work of Walsden on the religious side, it had fatally shown to those lads of the brigade and the club how a strong man can give up the struggle and abandon all self-control. Better, far better, that they had never seen his face.

At these times he felt a great remorse. But his love for Lilian, deeper and purer now than it had ever been, came as a guiding and sustaining thought. For the rest of life, here was his task: to cherish Lilian. Yet here, too, what a hideous failure! Instead of rescuing her and giving her peace, he had dragged her down into the mud with him. Instead of guarding her, he was a charge upon her—weak, crippled, helpless.

Indeed he was wretchedly weak. When they told him that he might get out of bed, he could not stand without assistance. They had said he would be able to go away before the August Bank holiday; but August was nearly over, and still he could scarcely walk the length of the ward without fainting. He hobbled with a stick, his arm remained slung in its cradle, he was the wreck of a man. Nevertheless his own particular nurse seemed well pleased with him. "See," she said proudly, after he had been shaved and trimmed by the hospital hair-dresser, "see for yourself how nicely we have patched you up. You aren't a bit disfigured, and I think we deserve a lot of credit. . . . Now look at yourself in the glass."

He sat on the edge of the bed, supporting the glass on his knees, and studied the reflection of his face. It seemed to him to be the face of another man.

Surely it had undergone a startling change. Surely he used not to have this face. There was a contemptuous expression about the lips, a hardness of outlook, almost a dare-devil air—reminding him of types among the costers, the something aggressive or dangerous that tells one, "It is all right while things go smoothly with this fellow; but if trouble comes he is the sort to turn nasty, to go for people with his fists or with worse weapons if available"—an *untrustworthy* look.

All this was in his imagination only. To those who had known him in the past he was just the same. And people who had never seen him till recently found no fault with him. The nurses talked of his smile, and would have trusted him to any extent. His own nurse described him as a beautiful man. She asked him for his photograph, and was rather huffed when he said he did not possess one, and could not promise to be photographed at the first opportunity.

"I shall think it very mean of you if you don't. I shall ask your—your friend—Mrs. Churchill that is to be—to get you taken down at Sidmouth."

His friend was going to take him to Devonshire—the country that she loved—as soon as she could move him. She made all arrangements, she did everything for him, she was his prop and his guide. She came to him this evening, and he asked her if she thought he was different from what he used to be.

"No, of course not. What makes you ask such a question?"

"I don't know," and he laughed. "Perhaps it is because I have been excommunicated. It's absurd, but I feel like the Jackdaw of Rheims."

She winced and bowed her head. Each time that he spoke flippantly of the Church he caused her pain. She was ineradicably religious and her religion remained quite unchanged; all the things that he had abandoned were to her as sacred as ever.

Once or twice, lying awake at night, he tried to think of the Mirror and the Lamp.

Yes, they were there still, very faint and pale, because of his weakness, but still unshaken, undisturbed. The lamp is one's innermost self, and the mirror is one's mind. The lamp is not the soul, although you may call it that if you please. There is no immortal individual soul; but there is something implanted, imperishable, in one's self of selfs, and it has power to light the mirror and show one what is fair or foul.

The Mirror and the Lamp; in the wreck of all else they stood as the one thing firm, indestructible—at once symbol and reality.

XXXVIII

THEY left London on a glorious September day. It was so hot in the crowded third-class carriage of the Exeter train that Edward Churchill nearly fainted; and a clergyman, who had been diligently reading a sixpenny novel and chuckling at all the funny passages, saw his distress and made him change seats.

"Yes, I insist. Take my place. You'll be more comfortable in the corner. . . . Your husband will get some air here."

And unobtrusively the clergyman played the part of the good Samaritan, opening an old leather bag and fishing out a flask of brandy.

"Just take a nip of this. . . . There."

Then he resumed his novel, glancing at Edward from time to time to see if he was all right, showing a kindly solicitude. He talked to both of them at intervals, in a friendly, pleasant way, asking questions, but without any impertinent curiosity, and always breaking off the conversation suddenly and burying himself in the novel.

"Forgive me—I shall fatigue you with my chatter."

Before the journey was over he had asked if he might come to see them at Sidmouth. He said that he lived at a place not very far away. "I'll give you my address. My name is Gates—Allan Gates. I haven't a visiting card, but I'll write it down;" and he scribbled his address on one of the advertisement pages at the back of the novel, and was about to tear out the page. But then he checked his hand and offered the whole book to Edward.

"I want you to read this. It will amuse you. It is exceedingly clever."

Edward said he could not think of thus robbing Mr. Gates of the amusement that he had provided for himself.

"No, I beg of you. I insist. I am near the end—well, sufficiently near to guess how it all works out;" and he gently laid the book on Lilian's lap. "Don't let your husband be obstinate. You may like to read it aloud to him of an evening."

"Thank you," said Churchill, "you are very kind."

And indeed he thought that an unusually kind action had been performed. It was, as he felt quite sure, a dreadfully bad novel, but Mr. Gates believed it to be one of the best novels ever written.

They were fortunate in having secured cheap and comfortable rooms near the sea-front, and Lilian's belief in the healing property of her native air was justified by the rapid progress made by the invalid. Soon now he would be quite well. He could already dispense with the arm sling, he walked farther and farther every day; but his joy was to lounge about the beach, to loll upon soft banks of sand and watch the sea-gulls swim above the lazily breaking waves, observe the sunlight on their wings, and think and dream. His eyes brightened always at sight of his dear companion as she came towards him among the boats and nets, with her scarf blowing loose—looking such a graceful slender girl, carrying herself so easily and freely. She had more colour in her cheeks now; she seemed quite happy.

Allan Gates had come to see them two or three times, and they both liked him. He was so cheerful and friendly. He asked Edward what he proposed to do with himself when his cure was complete.

"Well, I must look out for work."

"I wonder what sort of work."

"I scarcely know myself. Anything to turn an honest penny."

They were drawing slowly but steadily towards the end of their fifty pounds; the blue serge suit began to look shabby; life must soon be attacked again. When they talked of their future plans they foresaw some worry and annoyance.

In this connection Lilian had tentatively suggested that he should change his name; but he at once refused to adopt such a suggestion. It was not to be thought of for a moment.

"What—take an alias, as though we were criminals? It would be to admit that we had done wrong. And we have done no wrong."

"No," she said sadly; "but we can't hope that the world will ever take that view."

And she pleaded that their new start should be truly a fair start, with no handicap of preconceived prejudice to contend against, no weight of suspicion for her to carry. "If people find out, well, we can't help it; but don't tell them before hand. It's not fair to me. I can't face other women if they know."

"Very well," he said. "If you wish it—but it will be difficult."

He did not like the idea of deception; but truly when he pondered it there seemed to be no alternative. He could not go about the world announcing that they were not a legally married couple. He must speak of her as his wife, because he considered her his wife. People could be left to find out the truth for themselves. But he would utter no lies.

She made him promise also that he would not inform people that he had been inhibited. No one need know that he had been in the Church and had left it.

"But Lilian—for instance—Allan Gates! Am I to say nothing to him?"

"No, why should you?"

"I—I feel a great attraction to him. Without explicit words, he is offering us his friendship. I think he is a friend that I should value."

"If he became a friend—if you were forced to tell him anything say that it is our secret. He would respect the secret."

"Yes, but about religion. I couldn't pretend with him."

"There will be no need. He hasn't talked about religion, has he?"

"No, not yet."

Allan Gates was in charge of a church at Lipsford Valley, a village over the hills ten miles away, where the cloth mills, cottages, the church, and everything else belonged to a most respectable family of the name of Burnage. He had a charming parsonage with a nice garden, "And I love it," he said, rubbing his hands together. "I am too fond of it—much fonder than I ought to be." He told them all about himself. He was a bachelor, alone in the world. For a long time he had been curate at a big northern town, and he might have obtained preferment, but he possessed no ambition. "Lipsford is just a backwater. Life leads nowhere there. Perhaps I am wrong to be so contented."

He used to come to Sidmouth sometimes by train, and then he wore the orthodox black; and sometimes on his bicycle, in which case he wore grey flannels and a straw hat: but whether dressed as a priest or a tourist, he was looked out for by Churchill and welcomed with pleasure. He came often.

He was about forty years of age, a fairly tall man, strong and wiry; with a healthy olive complexion, hard features, and a lowish forehead which seemed high because of his baldness. He had a short stubby beard that had been black and was now turning grey; his eyebrows were thick and bushy, almost meeting over brownish eyes—not opaquely brown eyes, but of a speckled colour, with plenty of light in them. His voice was hearty, full of tone, most pleasant to the ear.

To Churchill, looking deeper than the surface aspect, he seemed to be the typical perfect Christian; tolerant, brave and cheerful; simple and happy of mind; sorry for and anxious to alleviate the suffering in the world, but quite sure of the good things waiting for everybody in heaven.

He invited Lilian and Edward to visit him at Lipsford Valley, and after considerable persuasion they agreed to go. They both enjoyed their outing. Lilian, especially, fell in love with the place, saying it was so restful, so little spoilt by modern innovation, so truly Devonian.

The manufacturing settlement lay along the edge of a stream about a mile further down the valley than the ancient village, which they had passed coming from the station, and, in spite of its purely utilitarian character, it did not mar the natural beauty of the landscape. Even the cloth mills themselves, built of fair stone, and of no great height, were not unsightly; around them clustered many buildings of irregular shape, while here and there a farmhouse had been converted to industrial purposes, and its gables and ridged barns rose above the lower roofs that closed it in. Some of the work-people's cottages were ranged in cliff terraces on the abrupt hillside and had a most picturesque effect. The dwellings of overseers, managers, and so forth, the superiors of the small community, stood on the roadside beyond Allan Gates's church and parsonage, a tributary of the stream running in front of them, with little stone bridges at the garden gates. Across the main stream and a flat space of rich meadows, the ground on the other side of the valley sloped gently upward, and here was the principal seat of the Burnage family, a white Georgian house with a portico, and the woods and hills behind it to keep it snug and warm. It looked at once grand and peaceful in the mellow sunlight. Autumn had not yet touched the foliage of the beech woods; cotton gardens were full of flowers; the fruit still hung on orchard trees; the smoke from peat fires seemed to mingle in the soft air with the perfume of newly-turned earth and the sound of bells calling the work-people to their easy labour.

Lilian, looking backward from the porch of the parsonage, sighed. It was all so pretty, so very different from Poplar and Barking.

After luncheon their host showed them with innocent pride the amenities and conveniences of his house—the "book-room," which one had to search carefully before one could discover any books, the tiny kitchen, the pantry, the cupboards where he kept gardening implements, fishing-rods, and his big pair of foul-weather boots.

"Yes, very convenient, isn't it?" And he repeated something that he had said before. "My conscience often pricks me. Perhaps I ought not to be so contented."

"Anybody would be contented here," said Lilian.

Time did not permit of their making further explorations, but on their way back to the railway station they had the privilege of seeing old Mrs. Burnage drive past in her fine carriage, and they met another of the family, Mr. Gordon Burnage, on foot. Gates introduced them to him, and they stood talking for two or three minutes.

He told Edward that his great-great-grandfather used to take the cloth in bales on pack animals to the market at Exeter, and the track over the hills was called "Pack walk" to this day. He was obviously gratified when Lilian, shyly making conversation, said that Devonshire had always been her favourite county.

One afternoon, soon after this visit, as Churchill and Gates sat on the Sidmouth beach together, Gates gave a full and minute account of all that had not been inspected or described at Lipsford Valley. Churchill loved to hear him talk. Although neither clever nor intellectual, he never bored one. Interested himself in all he spoke of, he made it interesting to others. So Churchill listened attentively to long character sketches of old Mrs. Burnage, the grand chieftain of the clan; of Miss Adela, her great-niece; as well as of Mr. Gordon Burnage and Mr. Edrick Burnage, who were managing directors of the three cloth mills. As Mr. Gordon had said, the whole place had belonged to the family for generations. In a sense it was a unique industrial community. All the work-people were very well cared for. They had the use of baths, libraries, recreation rooms; there was an excellent institute; there was even a scheme of secondary education with courses of lectures, and so on—all run by the family. "They do everything," said Gates. "Mr. Edrick always speaks of us as a republic, but, between you and me, we are really an absolute monarchy. But it is a beneficent rule. There is nothing to rub one the wrong way—no tyranny of any sort."

Edward sat with his back against the stern of a boat, his hands clasped behind his neck, watching the animated face of the speaker, listening to the kind friendly voice, enjoying every trivial detail of the discourse, but not in the least guessing its drift.

"Our Institute has not been too successful of late. We had a person who looked after it—very badly. Now I am glad to say he has gone. We want an altogether superior class of man who could attend to the library also, arrange things instead of waiting to be told what to do. What we want—if we could only get them—is a really well-educated couple—the wife to supervise various small matters and perhaps do something in the music line. Our music has been a weak point," and he paused, smiled, and scratched his beard.

"We are asking for a lot, aren't we? Mr. Gordon Burnage offers as rumuneration only thirty shillings a week—

for the two—the man and his wife. It is very little. But there is the cottage—quite a nice cottage, with fuel and light—a furnished cottage. Living, too, is cheap. How does it sound?" and he beamed at Edward. "For a man of your gifts and power, it is ridiculous; but still, if you are at a loose end, will you come and give us a trial?"

"Gates, you—you quite overwhelm me. But I fear it is impossible."

"Why? You can't guess how I want you to come. Selfishly—because it will mean so much to me. Mr. Gordon Burnage instructs me to make you the offer definitely—to come and see how you get on;" and Allan Gates pleaded strenuously in favour of the peaceful, happy life of his backwater. "It will suit you—for a time, at any rate, till you find something better. Your wife liked the look of it. I'm sure your wife would like to come."

"Yes," said Churchill, "Lilian would like it. I, too. But I don't know if I have the right to accept. There are things about me—about both of us—that you don't know." He was looking out across the water, at the sails of a distant ship that glittered whitely in the haze where sky and sun melted into one. "I should warn you—I must tell you that I am not a believer." He unclasped his hands, shifted his position, and played with the sand, picking up as much of it as one hand would hold and letting it drift through his fingers. "I don't believe."

"You don't believe?" said Allan Gates, without the slightest surprise in his tone, smiling, beaming in friendliness.

"No, I used to. But now I don't."

"Well, what can one say? Don't let's talk about it," and Gates stretched himself, as though about to get up. Then he behaved in a manner that moved Churchill strangely. "I don't mind, if you don't mind." He had taken Churchill's hand, and he pressed it affectionately. "Leave it all as it is. You once believed. You have ceased to believe. But you will believe again."

And Edward Churchill, looking at him, saw his face all lit up with love, and his eyes soft and glowing; and he thought, *"This man is my brother."*

They both rose to their feet and walked away together along the water's edge, Churchill feeling that, though quite unworthy, he had gained something of great value. He thought, "Except for Lilian, who means and is the universe, this is the grandest thing that has come to me."

They walked for a little way without speaking, and it was Churchill who broke the silence of happy thought.

"You don't understand. I could not teach the orthodox faith even by implication."

"That doesn't matter, if you don't want to teach infidelity."

"No, on my honour."

"Then that's all right. Besides, you won't be required to teach."

"But still you don't understand. For certain reasons, because of things that have happened, I feel myself an outcast. I am rejected now by everybody;" and he quoted the Psalm, "'I became a reproof among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours; and they of mine acquaintance were afraid of me.'"

"Look!" said Allan Gates, pointing to the play of light and shadow on the water. "Small clouds in the sunshine—how quickly they pass, how soon all is bright again! Your trouble, whatever it has been, will pass away."

"Allan, why are you so good to me? Why should you care for me?"

"I don't know. Perhaps because I am a very lonely man—perhaps just because I took to you at first sight. But I have never cared for anybody as much as I do for you."

"I am not worthy. I don't trust myself. I may repay you badly."

"I'll run the risk," said Allan Gates. "If you don't trust yourself, *I* trust you."

XXXIX

There were perhaps twelve hundred hands, men and women, boys and girls, employed at the mills, and truly they had no cause to complain of the conditions under which they worked. They were well nourished, well clad; they received a sufficient wage. They dwelt perhaps in the midst of an artificial prosperity; for it seemed doubtful if the cloth-making was any longer an enterprise that could be justified on strict business principles. But the Burnages, having amassed fortune by making cloth, having made cloth for so long a period, went on making it instinctively, or as almost a pious family custom. Their mills and the small social domain gave occupation to their minds, filled their lives with a wholesome, orderly routine of easy effort and readily observable result. They had fought hard in keeping out Board Schools, they needed no Government aid, they liked to do everything themselves, and in their own way.

If anybody was not pleased with their way, he had his alternative. He need not stay in Lipsford Valley. Mr. Edrick Burnage would quickly suggest change of scene to young fellows who seemed disposed to cause trouble by looking discontented, by running after the girls, or by airing foolish ideas at the works. "My lad, don't you think you are wasted here? A fine strong young man like you would be useful in her Majesty's forces;" and he spared no pains in putting him into uniform—the Navy and Army still being considered as an extremely useful institution for getting rid of undesirables. Heaven knows they cost enough: it was a pity if one could never find a use for them. He also in the kindest manner eliminated Nonconformists, although a great stickler for liberty of conscience and by no means a bigoted Churchman; but he used to say, "We happen always to have been Church of England, and we are so small a society that we cannot be happy unless of one mind." In all this he was actuated by honestly good motives.

The rule was parental, in certain respects almost grandmotherly. Water-troughs, drinking-fountains, the clock-tower, even the benches on the paths beneath the trees, bore tablets saying that they were presented by James Hacking Burnage, Esq., or erected to the memory of Emily Kate Burnage, as the case might be; and little notice boards primly recommended passers-by to "Do as you would be done by. Why destroy what has been arranged for the pleasure of others as well as yourself?" "Please close this gate," said one side of a board. "Thank you," said the other side of the board—a nasty little ironical dig, this "Thank you," if you had left the gate open. Nothing was too small to receive attention, if a supervising eye could suggest improvements likely to conduce to the common welfare. Mr. Gordon Burnage, for instance, personally visited dust-bins and back premises, accompanied by a sort of village bailiff, going his round like a commanding officer doing billets.

He complimented Lilian on the state of her dust-bin when he paid his first visit to the Churchills' cottage. "That is right—the lid on. It is so important to keep the lids on. . . . If you only knew how often I say that, and how little heed is given to my words!"

He offered domestic hints about meat safes and the preservation of food, and praised the curtains that Lilian had hung in the windows of the living-room. "May I come in? Thank you. How neat and nice everything is. And your garden, too—very tidy. It is well to be careful to see that the culvert does not get choked with dead leaves or vegetable matter," and he pointed through the window to the little bridge from the road. "Now have you all that you require in the way of furniture? Don't scruple to ask for anything you want. We are always anxious to make every one comfortable."

As newcomers the Churchills were ceremoniously bidden one Sunday afternoon to see the glasshouses and drink tea at the Burnage mansion, and on their arrival they were plunged immediately into a large family gathering. The wives of Mr. Gordon and Mr. Edrick Burnage had come from their respective houses; there was Miss Adela Burnage, a pretty girl of twenty; and outside the windows of the drawing-room one saw girls and boys of various ages playing on the terrace with their governess. These were the children of a Burnage who had become a barrister in London—a talented young man who had turned his back on cloth and caused grief thereby, but had now been forgiven. A large, silent man and two small, soberly dressed women were probably not blood relations; they had merely joined the party for luncheon, but they possessed solid interest in the works; they had always belonged to the place, and might be counted Burnages by adoption. There was also a tall languishing lady of thirty, a Burnage by birth, who, one somehow gathered, had been unhappy in her marriage and had returned to the family. She had airs and graces and intense glances, and was different from all the others. People addressed her as "Daphne" or "Mrs. William," and when everybody was passing through the dining-room—an impressive chamber with fluted columns and family portraits—on their way to the hothouses, Churchill heard her give a loud sigh. In the hall she handed him a purple velvet cloak with an ermine collar, and when he had assisted her to drape herself in the garment she smiled and half closed her large dark eyes, but, unlike the notice-boards, did not say "Thank you."

Mrs. Burnage, senior, headed the procession. She was a resolute, white-haired, ruddy-cheeked old lady, and all followed her as their natural chieftain and leader. On the terrace she called for her scissors, and immediately the children flocked round her, asking if she intended to cut a nosegay.

"Yes, I will cut a nosegay."

And a chorus took up her words. "Aunt Lucy is going to cut a nosegay. . . . Yes, of course, dear, Auntie will cut a nosegay." It appeared to be a sort of rite, this cutting of a nosegay, understood by all.

"Auntie, may I help you?" asked a little boy.

"No," said the old lady, "Mrs. Churchill will help me;" and she kept Lilian at her side, as they entered the range of glasshouses and slowly passed through them, sometimes telling the visitor which flower to gather, sometimes snipping off the flowers herself.

"There, my dear. That sprig of verbena, if you please. Can you reach it? . . . Yes, that will do nicely."

In one of the houses Churchill found himself again close to the tall, ermine-clad Daphne, and she startled him by speaking to him while she stooped over some pot plants.

"I suppose, Mr. Churchill, this all seems to you very small, very narrow."

"Oh, no," he said, looking round vaguely at the long shelves, the hot-water piping, and the metal stanchions. "They seem to me very fine houses—room for so much."

Mrs. William raised her large eyes, and smiled at him wearily.

"I didn't mean this little prison of glass and iron, but the larger prison outside. I meant Lipsford, your present employment, *us*." And she closed her eyes and opened them widely. "I should have thought you felt like an eagle in a cage."

"Oh, no," said Edward, very blankly.

"I was a bird once," said Daphne; "but they broke my wings on the wheel of life."

Just then Mr. Edrick Burnage came and put his hand on her shoulder, and Edward was pleased to have his company. The lady struck him as so very strange.

"Well, Mrs. William," said Mr. Edrick prosaically, "were you glad to find that the dividend on those Brewery shares was all right?"

At the far end of the houses the head gardener stood waiting for his mistress, and he gave her strips of bass to tie up her nosegay. This she did slowly and laboriously, with knuckly old fingers that shook. Then she handed the nosegay to Lilian.

"Yes, for you, my dear."

Lilian was surprised, overcome by the honour done her; but everybody else had, of course, known what was coming. This appeared to be the invariable conclusion of the rite: the nosegay was always for the visitor.

There was great pomp at the tea-making and tea-drinking—an immense silver kettle that only Mr. Gordon could manage, and servants very busy laying out tables with food. Old Mrs. Burnage sat in a large chair at a little distance, and every one waited on her.

"Aunt Lucy, will you have a sandwich?"

"Do try this cake, Auntie."

"No, my dear, I do not wish anything more." She called all young women and children "my dear."

Suddenly somebody missed Daphne, and somebody else discovered that she had retired to her room with a headache. A good deal of commiseration was expressed, until it was observed that old Mrs. Burnage was grumbling to herself and drumming on the arm of her chair. Immediately, with ready tact, Mr. Gordon changed the conversation, and one understood instinctively that Daphne's airs and graces and headaches often got upon the nerves of the sturdy old dame.

They talked of contemporary art, literature, and politics. Speaking of the last exhibition at the Royal Academy, all agreed that it had been inferior to that of the previous year. "But, Uncle, didn't you admire Mr. Leader's picture?" Yes, Mr. Leader was admirable as usual. So was Sir Frederick Leighton; and of course the same encomium was due to Sir John Millais and Mr. Alma Tadema. One could rely on the old favourites; it was the younger school that disappointed.

Certainly there was sententiousness in the tone of their talk; but they were very courteous, refusing the snare of argument, saying, "Forgive me if I interrupt you, Gordon. I point this out in illustration of the truth of your remark," or "As my brother has well said."

Speaking of a play, an adaptation from the work of Monsieur Alexandre Dumas Fils, they said they thought nothing had been gained by bringing such a topic upon the stage.

"No, I regard it as a mistake."

"Yes, it was, in my opinion also, a mistake."

And the large silent man shook his head affirmatively for quite a long while, seeming to say, more forcibly than if he had spoken aloud, that it was a *thundering* mistake.

Talking of Lord Salisbury, Mr. Balfour, and other lights of the political arena, they quoted a recent speech delivered at Birmingham, and passed on to the always increasing perils of trade unionism and the new wild notion of securing special representations for labour.

"Mr. Churchill, I am sure you agree with me," said Mr. Edrick, very courteously, and not waiting for an answer.

"Is not labour, like every other interest, already represented? What more can reasonably be demanded? Such proposals cannot but have an unsettling effect."

"There," said Mr. Gordon, "I concur heartily. I verily believe this ferment of discontent among the industrial classes which is being fostered by a small minority—happily a very small minority—of our public men, will eventually cause great trouble, if not checked promptly. It is to my mind the great danger of the times."

But old Mrs. Burnage was bristling and muttering in her chair, apparently very angry at the mere thought of any one daring to unsettle her little labour realm at Lipsford, and Mr. Gordon was about to change the conversation again when the large man interposed. It was the first time that he had spoken. He had a deep rolling voice, and he said he thought the whole social fabric of England was going to pieces. One thing alone was holding it together—the Queen upon her throne. When she went, he would not be surprised if all fell "like a house of cards."

The ladies, including Miss Adela, assented eagerly.

"The *dear* Queen!"

"Ah, yes, I don't like to think of what will happen when she is taken from us."

Old Mrs. Burnage said, rather testily, "Creaking doors hang long;" but whether she was thinking of the Queen, the fabric of society, or herself, nobody clearly gathered.

Such was the family—perhaps, not very original in their views, but kindly and polite, thinking well of themselves, but honestly meaning well by others. Edward and Lilian, except in the way of business, saw little of them. This invitation of the early days was not repeated. The visit was like going to Court. It showed that they were accepted. The wives of Mr. Gordon and Mr. Edrick did not ask them to their houses, but Mrs. William called upon them once or twice.

They had come on approbation, but they were now firmly established. Although there had been talk of producing testimonials, nothing further was said. Allan Gates had chosen them for the appointment, and every one had confidence in his judgment.

Churchill's work, always expanding under the direction of

Gates, was entirely secular; but he did many things that in the past had occupied his friend. Beyond his duties as custodian of the library, he had evening classes with three or four pupils at a time, and he often lectured at the Institute on historical and literary subjects. All that he did was well done, and for the lectures especially he took inordinate pains, writing and re-writing them, weighing every sentence. But the work, no matter how conscientiously he performed it, was child's play after his experience at St. Bede's, and he had leisure for reading.

He read at this period with avid pleasure, thinking deeply of all he read, examining the change in his receptive faculties that had been caused by his altered mental attitude, seeking even in the most unlikely materials all that should help to consolidate his philosophy of life and confirm his idea of his personal relation to the universe. For, as he knew well, when a man frees himself from the trammels of time-honoured error, he must walk warily on the untrodden paths he has opened out.

No questions had been asked as to why he never went to church. The rule, although grandmotherly, was beneficent. If he had attended the Wesleyan chapel up the valley, he might doubtless have been called to account by Mr. Edrick Burnage; but, as it was, nobody seemed even to remark his absence from the commodious edifice that had been built and maintained by the family, and the freedom of Sunday mornings was very pleasant to him. Lilian, of course, regularly listened to Allan's weekly sermon, and she often relieved the organist at the evening services. She said that Allan preached with great fervour.

She was at first perhaps more conspicuously successful than Edward in these new surroundings. Her musical gifts found high estimation. The young girls and the older women loved her, and, whether she wished it or not, her influence over them became strong. They came to her when in trouble, to tell her of quarrels with their young men or of pain caused by the harshly critical tongues of their husbands, and they learned from her many pretty little arts of home management. She had a genius for home, and not till now had she been permitted to give it the least scope.

As time passed she seemed to make their cottage prettier every day. Their servant-maid adored her, aided her with a loyal delight. Her great treat was when after long economy they felt themselves justified in taking a trip to Exeter for the purchase of some modest decoration—lamp-shade, table-cover, flower-vase. She came back radiant, installed the new object, linked her hands through Edward's arm, and stood before it admiring.

"See," she used to say, "doesn't it make the whole room different?"

Yet was she quite happy? Edward sometimes asked himself the question. It was for her sake that he had come here. Nothing else really mattered to him. Her happiness was all he asked from fate, and he himself had been given so much in the friendship of Allan Gates.

This indeed was wonderful and precious—the thing that he had never before enjoyed. It was comradeship and brotherhood. Allan was what his brothers should have been to him. With Allan he could feel always very young, able to snatch joys that usually belong only to youth; when to walk about with the boy one loves is sufficient for entertainment, and to break from a walk to a run, to get hot from efforts that have no goal, to get cold by halts prolonged without reason, to make meaningless discoveries in a barn or loft, are more satisfying than the highly organised festivals supplied by elders in the company of those one does not care for.

In so much Allan was childlike. Not only in his unquestioning faith, but in his tricks and mannerisms. He was clever with his hands, ingenious at devices of simple carpentry; and at such work he used to whistle and sing, or, if alone, talk to inanimate objects, addressing a nail as "my friend." "There, my friend, one on the head for you. Yes, we'll knock you on the head, like that . . . and like that." When puzzled, or for a moment baffled by some small difficulty, he had a trick of rubbing his nose with a forefinger, and puckering his brows, giving himself the rueful expression of a child who is in disgrace or affliction. Then after a moment he would laugh, snap his fingers, and shrug his shoulders, saying, "Never mind. I'll get round it before bed-time. Difficulties are only made to be surmounted," or some other cheerful aphorism.

He was never so well contented as when engaged on a carpenter's job for Lilian. At all times he held himself in readiness as her handy man, and would hurry to the cottage to put up a shelf, hang a curtain rod, mend a chair back. Indeed, had she allowed him, he would have cleared the dust-bin, scoured the culvert, dug in the garden for her. He did not pay her compliments or say she was pretty—perhaps was not even aware of the fact; but he wrapped her round with admiration and regard, declaring that everything she did was right, that there had never been any one like her.

At all times, too, he showed a great care and delicacy in not intruding on their love as husband and wife, or in the slightest degree challenging her right to Edward's society. "No," he used to say, "I cannot join you this evening. I have a task that I must not neglect. . . . No, thank you very much, but leave me out of your plot to-morrow. Go there by yourselves. Two are company—three are none." Then you and Edward can go," Lilian replied; "and I'll stay at home." Truly he need not have been so careful; for Lilian also was very fond of him, and these three made the best company in the world.

There was only one thought that ever troubled Edward with regard to this friendship, a cloud upon its splendour, and that for him dimmed what otherwise would have been perfectly bright hours. He hated the tacit deception which he ought never to have practised and which still continued. But at last this cloud passed and all was clear between them.

One Saturday Lilian told him that she was going to the early Celebration next morning.

"It is a great relief to me," she said, "to be able to go. So long has passed since I participated—not since you and I have been together. But, Edward, to enable me to do so, I had to tell Allan everything about myself."

"I am very glad," and he took her clasped hands, held them to his breast, and kissed them. "What did Allan say?"

"He said that I might come. It is good of him. Many priests would have refused."

The same evening Edward spoke to his friend of this. They were alone in Allan's "book-room," going through some accounts.

"Lilian has made a confession to you, Allan, and she says you will receive her as a communicant."

"Of course."

"Thank you. It is what I would have expected, Allan. I knew how broad-minded you are. But I am none the less grateful."

Then in the open talk for which he had pined he told Allan all about the man Vickers. He had little hope now that Vickers would ever help them by getting a divorce. Indeed he had been advised that from the legal point of view Vickers by the lapse of time had condoned the offence. He had sat down on his wrongs too long. Moreover, he had notoriously consoled himself in a brutal profligate manner; he could not go to the Court with even technically clean hands.

"So there we are," said Allan, rubbing his nose.

"Now that you know the worst, are you sorry that we came?"

"Of course not."

"It has weighed upon my mind. I ought to have told you at the beginning."

"No, I stopped you. I wouldn't let you tell me."

"You didn't guess the truth?"

"No," said Allan, and he rubbed his nose rather ruefully. "I did not guess that part of it."

"If you had known, would you have acted differently?"

"I scarcely know what to say. It is all over and done with."

"Do you feel that you ought now to tell the authorities?"

"No—that's impossible. Certainly not," and Allan became quite cheerful again, rubbing his hands together, and smiling contentedly. "But," he went on, "is there anything else you want to say now we are about it?" and he looked at Edward almost archly. "We have opened the cupboard. If there's more than one skeleton, shall we have them out, and put them back, and close the cupboard door?"

Then Edward told him that he was a priest of the Church of England who had been inhibited.

"Ha, ha," said Allan, jumping up from his chair. "Look here!" He seemed quite triumphant, as he opened a Clergy

List, turned the pages, and pointed to the entry of Churchill's name. "Look. Do you see the note of interrogation? I made that pencil mark—that large query—three days after we first met. There must be several Edward Churchills, though only one has been ordained, but I thought you were that man. Something you said set me thinking. Yes, I guessed that all right—but I didn't guess the other half of the mystery," and again, for a moment, he had a rueful look. Then he shut the book with a decisive action and laughed gaily. "Rather clever of me, Edward. A detective couldn't have spotted you quicker. But you set me thinking." As he said this his eyes grew tender. "I thought of you a great deal."

"What did you think?"

"I thought then exactly what I think now. You'll come back to us. Dear old fellow, all your doubt will pass. God will bring you home in His own good time."

"I can't let you count on that, Allan."

Allan shrugged his shoulders good-humouredly. He counted on it as surely as he counted on to-morrow's sunrise. The same power that lit the wide world would light the small dark places in his friend's heart. But why talk about it any more?

The cloud upon their friendship had gone; but there followed now a time in which Edward Churchill suffered greatly from a return of the sensation of failure. In his highest desire he felt frustrated. What was wrong with Lilian? What more could he do for her?

Sometimes he thought of the natural crown of a woman's life—motherhood. She who was so good and sweet, with a bounty of tender sympathy that flowed out to these work-girls, to all children, should not herself be childless. If only they had a child, she would be happier. Yet when he spoke of this hope, she shook her head sadly.

"I want no one but you."

"You would have me still. We should be bound closer together."

"Oh, no," and she shivered, "I pray that may not happen. A child to which we could not give a name!"

Then she spoke so sweetly of their love that he could have wept in gratitude and sorrow.

"Lilian, my dearest girl. My own true girl."

"I am so poor a thing for you to love," she said. "So dreadfully beneath you—and I can never, never tell you what I feel. I can't wish that you had never seen me. Edward, I can't, can't wish that; but I know it might have been better for you in many ways. I have dragged you down."

He said she would break his heart if she ever said that again. It was he who had brought her low.

"No, you have raised me up—almost to heaven."

And she told him that she no longer cared or worried about what people might think of her. She cared for nothing, if they two could be together always.

"What can ever separate us?"

On winter evenings they used to walk along the road to the old village, away from the lighted windows and the work and the voices. The sunset glow faded from the hills, dusk crept upward, darkness filled the valley, and they were quite alone. She clung closer to his arm, and in the darkness said things she would scarcely have dared to whisper if he could see her face.

For her those words, "As long as we both shall live," meant life after death also. "Till death us do part" carried the logical addition, "and until we are united again." The stronger their love, the more she craved for the certainty that they need face no real separation. She tried to make him say, "Yes, it is possible." She asked him if he himself could not believe even so much as that—or if not now, might he not one day believe it?

But he said No. He could not believe it.

His tone was sad and reluctant. He had seemed so glad when again she participated in the blessed Sacrament. He showed such tenderness for her religion. Except in their first days—their honeymoon—when he poured out all his thoughts, he had never scoffed at religion. He never spoke of it. But when she forced him to speak, it seemed to her that he became hard and cold as a rock. He spoke, when she compelled him, with terrible plainness.

"I do not believe. If you mean survival after death, I do not believe that is true. I believe that death is extinction of the individual—utter annihilation. Something that was and is not. I believe in the soul only in the sense of the spiritual forces that are implanted in each one of us. I do not believe in the immortality of the soul in any other sense than that life similar to the life in us will be seen in others. I do not believe in the soul, or indeed in life, as something that issued from a god and to him will return. It is a beautiful idea. I wish it were true. I do not believe it is true. I do not believe in immortality at all, except as a metaphor for the chain of life that passes from parent to child, on and on, and always upwards in its curve, seeming a chain, but in truth with each link severed by the great shears of death. That is what I believe."

His voice, so level and so calm, sounding in the darkness, filled her with awe. The words were terrible. They crushed her spirit, struck heavy and cold upon her heart. She walked by his side with bowed head.

And he, pressing the hand upon his arm, went on as though to justify what he had said. He explained that it was a matter of conscience with him to say what he believed to be true. He could be silent; but if he spoke at all of his private convictions, he must testify to the truth. The truth is sacred—that is, what a man honestly believes the truth must be sacred to him, the man. It is of no value to any one else, of course. But it is all important to him, and he cannot palter with his deep-rooted conviction. Self-respect, self-reliance, all fails if you refuse to maintain the right to your own reasoned thoughts.

And she was thinking, "It is my fault. It is I who am to blame. But for me, he would have remained true to the Church; he would have continued his noble work, beloved and honoured by all. I have ruined his life. I am the first cause of his atheism."

These thoughts for a time made her more and more unhappy.

It was Allan Gates who brought her comfort. He saw her trouble, understood it, drove it away almost forever with his cheerful, unshaking confidence. "Never worry about him," he told her. "Just give him time. He is passing through a phase; but he will come back to us. Trust me for that. I *know* I am right."

Allan spoke of her to Edward, startling him with a strange echo of something that happened a long time ago, when two men—not friends, as he and Allan, but enemies by instinct—sat alone in a room not unlike this room, and one said to the other: "Can't you be kinder to your wife?" It was Lilian then as now.

"Dear old boy," said Allan, "forgive me if I have wounded you. Shut me up like a box if I have said too much. I only meant that unconsciously you have forgotten how your lightest words may cause immense consequences—with her. If you even touch her faith, if you break what she most leans on, if you don't allow her to think her own thoughts——"

But this was too much. Edward, greatly agitated, protested that it was all the other way round. He had never tried to rob her of her faith. It was she who would not leave him *his* thoughts.

"But need you tell her your thoughts?" asked Allan deprecatingly.

"No, not unless she makes me. Then I cannot deny them." And he went over the ground again. Self-respect, the barest dignity of manhood, prevented one from abrogating the privilege to think for oneself. He reminded Allan of how religionists refused to sign confessions of faith alien to their own.

"Allan, they refused their lives on such terms. And they were right. They called it refusing to deny God; but it was really refusing to deny themselves. That was the logical basis of their refusal. . . . Take my life, take everything from me; but don't take the reasoned dignity that lifts me above the brutes—don't trample out the right to think for myself."

Allan smiled. "In conversation," he said cheerily, "as in everything else, you are my intellectual superior."

"Rubbish," said Edward, and the excitement under which he had spoken instantly subsided.

"Yes, you carry too many guns for me."

"Not a bit of it. Fire back."

"Well, I think you just put everything upside down."

"How?"

"You speak of martyrs who sacrificed self, and you draw the lesson that it is right to exalt self."

"No—far from it—I don't say exalt self, but give self its just due. Allan, we all are governed by self—we must be—it is in the nature of things."

"Yet you have never acted on such a theory. Your work, nearly all your life, has proved you to be something of an altruist."

"Any altruism I have practised has been in a selfish search for happiness—merely to appease self. Where altruism fails is where the logical reason for it is forgotten."

"Have it your own way," said Allan with the utmost good-humour. "But, dear old boy, do remember to play light in your wonderful logic when dealing with those who are not so strong as you."

"Yes," said Edward, "I'll play light. I'll remember. Thank you, Allan—for thinking of Lilian. Henceforth I'll manage to evade discussion. Skilfully or clumsily, as best I can, I'll build a wall and hide myself behind it. . . . Yet if she, or any one else, breaks down my wall, they must see me as I am."

He was firm in the importance of his point—the right to one's own thought, because, as it seemed to him, it had its place in the new code of ethics that was to be his standard. His code was now formed.

He thought: "Of course every intelligent person must be something of an altruist; for how else can he hope for mental peace? But the altruism must be rational—the golden rule with strict limitations. Give to others, give freely, largely, more than you can spare; make sacrifices of much that you desire; but do not run the risk of obliterating yourself altogether. Self has rights, and in certain cases must fight for them. It is weak and disloyal to oneself, the race, and the established scheme of natural progress, not to study self, when one is quite sure that is only asking one's due. The strongest man has only one life, and his work to do in it. Such a man, believing that he has a task to accomplish, must not allow himself to be turned from it.

"And I," he thought humbly, "am the weakest of men, with no task, and no direction; but still I must abide by the law, fighting for myself, refusing to obliterate myself, guarding myself and those I love from unceasing care, because I am myself, and beyond myself there is nothing that I can truly know."

This was to be the code. His philosophy of life had carried him no further. As it chanced, his code was soon and for a long time to be put to the test.

XL

Something utterly unexpected had happened. It was too fantastically absurd, but Robert Vickers had written asking them for aid.

Walsden sent on the letter. The outer envelope was addressed to Edward Churchill, Esquire, and inside this there was an envelope inscribed, "For Lilian." Edward handed it to her across the breakfast table, and at sight of the handwriting she trembled. She read the letter slowly, and gave it back to Edward without a word.

Vickers told her that he had lost his employment, the world had turned against him, and, as he phrased it, he had "regularly gone to pot." He said, "I cannot but lay it to your door. But let bygones be bygones. You are my wife still, and I appeal to you for help."

As Churchill read the letter his face hardened. Bygones were to be bygones, and, as Christians forgetting and forgiving, they were to help their enemy. So likely!

Vickers said further, "I am not what I was. I have been ill and am still very weak;" and he described other misfortunes. "I had to part with our old house, and sell every stick of the furniture. As you will see, I am living at Vernon Buildings. You will remember, the block beyond Emanuel's, by the railway. . . . You know me well enough to be sure that I would not ask you this if things were not very bad with me." It was an odious letter. Plainly enough, Vickers had set himself the task of writing such a letter as would achieve his immediate end—to get money.

"So very likely," thought Churchill, and he smiled contemptuously.

"What shall I reply?" asked Lilian.

"Don't reply at all. If any one replied, I would. But no reply is needed."

Lilian picked up the letter and re-read it.

"Let me have it," said Edward, and he folded the letter and put it in his breast pocket. "Don't give it another thought. His troubles and his sickness and all the rest of it are probably inventions. He wants cash to buy one of your successors a new bonnet perhaps, and it has occurred to him that it would be rather a humorous notion to make you pay for it."

"Oh, I don't think that what he says is untrue. If he had not fallen into real distress, he would not have written. His pride must be completely broken, or he could not have made such an appeal—an appeal for pity."

"Then he'll get no pity from me," said Churchill firmly.

Nevertheless, scarcely knowing why he troubled to do so, he wrote to Walsden to inquire as to the actual state of the man's circumstances; and during the next three days he thought often of the man himself. Lilian was thinking about him too. She asked to look at the letter again on two occasions.

"You must almost know it by heart," said Edward rather querulously. In fact, he himself knew it quite by heart: he had looked at it so often.

"I wanted to see what he says about Vernon Buildings. Yes, I know the place he means. Edward, it is a dreadful place. He must have fallen very low to go there."

Edward shrugged his shoulders, took the letter from her again, and went out for a stroll.

As he walked in the crisp night air he thought of his first meeting with Vickers, remembering with extraordinary clearness that early impression—the big, loud-voiced fellow, swinging his shoulders, pushing men off the pavement, shouting at them truculently—just a hulking brute. Thinking of later impressions, the details were less clear; no strong mental picture came. He remembered the ugly laugh, the swagger, amid the streams of words when Vickers inveighed against the ingratitude of the men who—as he now declared—had cast off their allegiance to him; but the rest seemed colourless, almost vague. Then he began to imagine what Vickers had been like as a young man before his frame grew heavy, his face coarsened, and his teeth turned yellow—or as a boy, when he was slender, clean, with eyes that looked out frankly at a world full of decent hopes and innocent pleasures. Even as a boy, could he have been like that?

When Churchill returned to the cottage Lilian was putting last touches to the table for their evening meal. It was all snug and bright in lamplight and firelight; her pretty face, pale as it was, lit up the room more than the lamp or the fire; she welcomed him as always with a smile, and suddenly, unbidden, an ugly mental picture presented itself to him—a picture of darkness and coldness, of squalor and want, of a sick man who once had been strong but was now weak.

Towards the end of the meal Lilian asked him a question.

"If Mr. Walsden says it is true, will you send him anything?"

"No. . . . Lilian, how *can* we?"

"No, I suppose not. In any case, we can't afford it."

"It is not that."

"If it was for somebody else—and one was certain he needed help—would you try to help him?"

"Yes, if it was anybody else—anybody worth helping—I would say yes, we ought to help him, as far as we could without detriment to ourselves."

"That is what I feel," said Lilian. "It seems so hard to turn a deaf ear to a call of that kind—a cry of distress. Not even to answer the letter!"

"The only answer he wants is some ready money. If we don't send that, no other answer is worth sending."

That night Churchill thought of Vickers waiting for the answer that would never come. He would anxiously expect it—calculating on the pity he had aroused, estimating their weakness perhaps, hoping that some trick of conscience would render them impotent to refuse. He would taste all the bitterness of disappointment then. If he was truly weak and ill, he would lie on his wretched bed, all alone perhaps, waiting and listening until some one passed on the stairs, and then he would call hoarsely and feebly, begging the passer-by to go down and find out at the caretaker's room if the postman had brought him a letter.

And Churchill thought of him as if in truth he had been somebody else, a stranger, any man, worthy or unworthy, who had been strong but was now weak, and who uttered a cry of distress, calling upon his fellow-men to help him.

Next morning they heard from Walsden. It was true that Vickers had severed his connection with the Trade Union, and after an illness had left the house where he had lived for so long. That was all that Walsden could tell them.

They sent Vickers some money, and from time to time they sent him a little more. This first time they had to do it, and Lilian said it made her easier in her mind, and Churchill said that, wrong or right, it must be done, but the first time should be the last time.

Lilian dreaded the horrid letters. The call came sometimes just when she was going to Exeter to buy something pretty or useful for the cottage or for herself. Answering the call meant the renunciation of a small desire, the sacrifice of personal comfort; but, after all, what did it matter? Only they had still further complicated their relations with the man. He on his side would be careful now not to publish the facts of the position, since if he brought scandal upon them he could scarcely hope to extract further Post Office orders. They on their side might seem to be paying him blackmail, buying his silence. Anyhow, if any hope had lingered as to the possibility of a divorce, it was now small indeed.

They should have been affluent at this period. Edward had long since cleared off all obligations to the bank and other creditors, making it his first care to repay the loan from his mother and doing this as speedily as possible, yet not speedily enough to escape a reminder from his stepfather, Mr. Barrett. Once out of debt, he came into the enjoyment of his full private income of a hundred per annum, in addition to the annual seventy-eight pounds of their joint emoluments. This was more than ample; but now, in the twelve months that followed, the secret drain upon their resources swamped the margin of ease.

The first summer at Lipsford they had been for a week's holiday on Dartmoor with Allan Gates. This year they could not go. Allan was taking a fortnight's holiday, and he was disappointed that they could not spend even half of it with him. He delicately hinted that if the question of expense prevented them, he would like them to come as his guests. They refused; and Allan thought that their real reason for refusing was because they wished to be by themselves, and ceased to complain, going away very cheerfully, nodding and smiling at them from the railway carriage, waving a handkerchief till the train carried him out of sight.

Edward Churchill knew his thought, had read it at once, but he could not bear that it should continue. There must be no more deception, however slight. So he wrote to his friend at the jolly little moor-side inn, telling him the truth, saying how much they missed him, and how glad they would be to see him once more at the end of the fortnight.

Next day Allan returned, and he spent his holiday with them at home at Lipsford, fishing with Edward in the stream, teaching Lilian to throw a fly, carrying their improvised tea-basket up the Pack Walk to the tamely pretty hilltops. The landscape might not be as grand as Dartmoor, nor the air so keen and invigorating, but he said it was the best holiday of his life. He maintained that nothing had given him the true holiday feeling in such full measure as to potter about the parsonage garden in his shirt-sleeves, knowing that he need not put on his jacket until he chose to do so; and the greatest treat of all was when he went to church to hear his substitute preach and found that the good man preached no better than he did himself—if so well.

XLI

They had been a little more than two years at Lipsford when Edward's mother died. He had not even known that she was ill, and the letter from Mr. Barrett that announced her death allowed him only just enough time to get to Brighton for the funeral. "I am prostrated with grief," said Mr. Barrett, in his letter, "and shall be glad of your support. You will understand that I cannot extend the invitation beyond yourself."

He bought a suit of black clothes in London, where he was obliged to spend a night, and next morning early he travelled down to Brighton. The putting on of these mourning garments, the journey, its cause and purpose, seemed to him dreamlike and unreal. In the train he listened to the talk of fellow-passengers, watched the flying landscape, for some time could neither meditate nor reflect. Then he found himself thinking, "She is dead—the mother that bore me—and I used to pray that I might die when she died. And now I am going to her funeral, and it is as though it were a stranger's. I am not even able to think of it—my mind is thronged with quite trivial matters—the most stupid fancy seems as important as the gloomy business that has brought me here. How is that possible?"

Then he thought, "Yes, but the mother I loved died years ago. My true mother was taken from me when she broke our compact, and forsook me for another."

But immediately he felt the hard egoism of this thought, its unworthiness, its cruelty—judging the dead, condemning her, forgetting benefits and tender care, because at last she ceased to live only for him. Could it be possible that even for a moment he had been guilty of such a thought? And there came rushing back on him memories of St. Dunstan's. He thought of her only as she was then—the friend, the comforter, the guardian saint. All the years rolled away, and it seemed to him that in spirit they were made one again. He could remember now nothing that was not sweet and good. Sadness, and still deeper sadness, filled his heart.

At the house on the East Cliff Mr. Barrett welcomed him, pressed his hand, thanked him for coming. Mr. Barrett looked old and feeble. A nurse in hospital uniform helped him to put on his black overcoat, and at intervals he gave a sob. The nurse felt in the breast pocket of the overcoat and told him he had another handkerchief there.

"Thank you," said Mr. Barrett, meekly and forlornly. "Ted, you will come in the first coach with me. Next to me, you are the principal mourner."

The funeral party gathered in a room that looked out upon the cliff. Outside all was bright and pleasant to the eye, sunlight and movement, people walking briskly, carriages rattling past. Edward was looking at well-remembered objects in the room itself—the very desk at which he had sat with her at his "preparation," when she used to help him; the old swing-chair; a water colour drawing of the cathedral cloisters. He felt like some one in a haunted house, among ghosts that no others could see, seeing them himself and hearing their voices. He could see his mother quite plainly as she used to be.

Then he was alone again with Mr. Barrett, in the mourning coach, driving down the hill, past the Pavilion, and along the level road towards the lofty viaduct.

"Everybody respected her," said Mr. Barrett, "and looked up to her. Did you see the flowers? Everybody has sent a wreath—and some very costly ones too—last mark of respect. We had made our circle—always the best sort of people;" and he began to cry, catching his breath, and stifling noisy sobs. "There, I must be patient under my affliction. I humbly thank Him who ordained that her last days were easy. I never left her, Ted, except to get a little air when Dr. Fry made me."

"I am sure you were good to her."

"I did my best," said Mr. Barrett humbly. "I made her happy. Pore soul, she'd had a rough time with you boys. Ted, I am not meaning to cast a stone. *You* were the kind one—the one she valued and built on, until—well," and he shook his head sorrowfully. "Ah me, that was a terrible blow to her. Couldn't be otherwise."

"You mean my leaving the Church?"

"Yes, the whole affair. It came to my ears first of all through a side wind, and I tried to soften the blow. I told her we couldn't at a distance judge the facts."

"I would have come to her to explain them, had she wished it."

"Ted, she did not wish it. And, frankly, no more did I. Nothing would have been gained—and I could not urge her to receive the lady."

"Please leave her out of it."

"There, let's say no more. I never have judged you, Ted—and this I tell you because I know your naturally kind heart. The grief over your affair did not hasten her end."

"Indeed I hope not."

"No, you have not that to lay on your conscience. She was ill for a long time."

"I wish you could have let me come to see her then."

"She never suggested it, Ted."

The phrases of the Burial Service, recited by Edward Churchill himself so many, many times, struck upon his ear with a force and beauty that he had not recognised till now. Resurrection, and the life of the world to come—yes, if only one could believe it. How beautiful the words, how splendid if there lay beneath them even half a truth to justify such hope. For him they held no gleam of hope; they were merely beautiful words. He stood at the grave side, tears streaming down his face, torn with sorrow and regret. An immense sadness and pity welled up and possessed him—pity for his poor mother that she might not a little longer go about in the sunlight; pity for Mr. Barrett, the broken old man, who had wounded or insulted him always, and even just now, but who had tried to do his best for her; pity for all who in this little transitory life try hard and fail; pity, above all, for those who miss or mock the higher joys of human love, and blandly stretch weak hands that close upon a shadow.

When all was over he lingered to say a few kind words to Mr. Barrett, who clung to his arm and thanked him again for having come.

"Your presence has supported me, Ted. I almost feel as if I couldn't have gone through it without you. . . . Ah me, what shall I do? I've lost my companion, and I'm too old to find another."

Edward went away full of sorrow; but it was as if some poison that for a long time had tainted his blood had been washed away from him in his tears.

The feelings aroused by the death of his mother did not quickly fade. Sadness remained with him, and yet inwardly he felt calmer, more at rest. Perhaps of late he had found life in the quiet valley too narrow, and, unconsciously growing weary of its stagnant contentment, had begun to suffer mentally because he could not satisfy that old craving for the ideal existence in which action blends with and guides the stream of thought; but, if so, the phase had now passed. He took greater interest in his humble task, and gave to it more of himself.

He had been prompt with sympathy and practical advice, but now in helping others he attempted the great lesson of teaching them how to help themselves. Young men with aspirations and older men with regrets began to trust him as a friend who never failed. All this had begun at the Library when they found what infinite trouble he was ready to take on their behalf, and again at his evening classes when a pupil shyly led him from the realm of generalities to some small concrete difficulty of everyday life. This quality of helpfulness in him was recognised more and more widely; so that it came to be talked of by the men at their work.

Thus, one day, Mr. Edrick Burnage heard an old hand in the fulling mill speak of it.

"Yes," said the old fellow, "Mr. Gates, he's the one to hearten yu up with what he says. But if yu wa'ant help, go to Mr. Churchill. Go and tell un yu'm be got in a fix. He'll put down what he's a-doing, he'll quit his food or his bed, but he wun't leave yu till he's helped yu through."

Mr. Burnage was well pleased in overhearing this compliment to a useful official, and he thought, not by any means for the first time, that the family had obtained a very serviceable article at a very low cost. Indeed, he talked of him with high approval in the family circle, and as a result of one such conversation he put some strange questions to Allan Gates.

"Tell me, Gates, so far as you have observed, do the Churchills get on well together?"

"Yes, of course."

"They are really a united couple—fond of each other and all that, not merely keeping up appearances?"

The blood had flushed Allan's olive-toned cheeks, and he spoke almost angrily. "No. But why do you ask?"

"Well, not from any wish to pry into people's private affairs, but just to ascertain the fact. I should think nothing of it either way, except for their peculiar position here in our society. For the sake of example one could not very well countenance in our midst a divided household, or the spectacle of a man and wife who sustained an outward show of affection, but secretly squabbled and——"

"They do not squabble," said Allan warmly.

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Edrick. "I was quite ready to believe it. I suspected that my informant was in error."

"I wonder who was your informant."

"It was Mrs. William. She entertains a good opinion of Churchill, and is anxious for his welfare, but her observation has misled her. Between you and me, Gates, Mrs. William is not the wisest of people. She often misunderstands things."

"Edward Churchill is not easy to understand." Allan's indignation had gone, and he spoke of his friend with a quiet seriousness. "He is a very beautiful character. The love between him and—and—and his wife—is most beautiful. Nothing could ever disturb it; nothing will ever make it change."

Relieved in mind, Mr. Edrick then praised Churchill cordially. Churchill was a valuable asset to the community. Gates could be congratulated on having found a person of such superior qualifications.

"How did you first hit upon him, Gates?"

"By accident."

"By accident! Well, Gates, many valuable discoveries are made by accident, if the truth were known. My great-grandfather discovered what we call the Burnage process of *lustering* by accident. But, with regard to Churchill, I hope he knows that we are well satisfied—and, between you and me, I hope we shan't ever lose him. My brother Gordon expresses wonder that he should be contented to stay, and believes he would easily find scope for his talents in a more enlarged sphere."

"I think he is like me in one respect, he and I have both done with ambition."

"Well, that is as it may be. Still for Churchill, who has the advantage of you in years—— My brother Gordon has gone so far as to say that we might wisely raise Mr. Churchill's salary, rather than run the risk of losing him after our relations have subsisted on such a pleasant footing for so long. That is a matter that I shall be quite prepared to consider, although I do not think we are justified in welcoming increased expense in any direction at the present time."

Mr. Edrick's hint as to the possibility of increased emolument did not lead to any action; but an addition to their means came to the Churchills from another source.

His mother had bequeathed a hundred a year in trust for her "dear son Edward," with power of appointment—as was recited by a copy of the clause in the will sent to him by a Brighton solicitor—to his legal wife or any child or children lawfully begotten in holy wedlock. Failing such appointment, the money at Edward's death would return to Mrs. Churchill's widower or his heirs and assigns.

Edward surmised that these provisions had been dictated by the avarice of Mr. Barrett. His poor mother would scarcely have discriminated so nicely, or looked so very far ahead, if she had not been assisted by some one who was, as well as a strictly orthodox moralist, a trained man of business; but Edward bore no malice to anybody. He had expected nothing. He accepted the bequest with gratitude.

Thus, once again they had enough for personal comfort, enough too to meet the hidden drain upon their purse, and these calls, moreover, for a little while had ceased.

But their renewed affluence was soon threatened. There came another call from Vickers; a cry of distress louder, sharper, more definite than any he had raised before. He was desperately ill, helpless—hopeless, if they did not listen to his cry. For the moment he had been taken into a hospital at Chelsea; but he would not be allowed to remain there, because of the almost permanently incurable nature of his case. Soon he might be alone, deserted, abandoned to a miserable death. He wanted a lot of money for nursing and doctoring, to give him a chance of recovery. He sent with his pencilled letter a certificate from the hospital, and the certificate seemed to confirm his statement that he was grievously ill.

"What are we to do?" asked Lilian.

They looked at each other blankly, and Edward sat thinking. Then he said, "Lilian, I had better go to him. I'll go to London and see for myself what can be done."

"It is what I would have wished—that some one should go. But we might ask Allan to go. Edward, let Allan go instead."

"No, I'll go myself."

He obtained leave of absence, provided himself with ready money, and went up to London. He was away four days, and on his return he looked tired and worried.

He said that Vickers was suffering from heart trouble and lung trouble, with some complications of intestinal derangement that he did not pretend to understand. But the doctors thoroughly understood, and he believed implicity in their judgment as to the case. Vickers was dying, or would die unless well treated. There was only one chance to save him. He could receive special treatment at a place in Staffordshire. It was an establishment known to and recommended by the London doctors. At this place Vickers would be given every chance that science and skill could devise. The chance would be a good one that he might be patched up and kept alive for many years. In any event he would be comfortable, safe, well cared for, at this Staffordshire establishment. But the cost of the cure would be considerable. The doctors said that the charges would amount to quite £200 a year.

That was the state of affairs.

"Now let us have supper," said Churchill. "I'll tell you more about it after supper."

Then, after their meal, they sat side by side in front of the fire. Their hands were linked, and Edward stared into the heart of the fire, as if seeing there the things he spoke of, while he told her about the pitiful state of Vickers, his thinness, his shrunken face and changed voice. He described how Vickers had pleaded for life, praying Churchill to move heaven and earth to get him the money—to put an advertisement in the newspapers, to visit charitable organisations, to go to his old societies and the trade union. And Churchill had done all this. "But, Lilian, the advertisement isn't likely to bring any response. The charities can't help him. The others *won't* help him. They do not like him. They have no sympathy with him. I followed all his directions, but it was no use. So then I came back to tell you;" and he raised his eyes and looked at her.

She sat silent, her hand squeezing his spasmodically, her lip drooping and quivering.

Then he spoke again of the man's prayer for life. "Lilian, it was very painful to hear."

Lilian was perturbed. She hid her face in her hands, and it was some time before she spoke.

"Edward, is there no one?"

"Yes," he said, "ourselves. There is no one else."

But the thing was too big for her; she shrank from it in dread. Why were they so tormented? Help him—yes, as much as was reasonable, more perhaps than was reasonable, but not in such a gigantic way as this.

"Edward, we haven't the money."

"Yes, just the money," he said; and he put the circumstances of their situation before her in plain terms. They had just two hundred a year of their own, in addition to their pay here at Lipsford. If they gave away their income and then happened to lose the pay, they might starve or go to the workhouse. But they were still young—that is, fairly young; they had no children; at the worst he should be able to earn their daily bread by manual labour. "I think," he went on, "that probably we ought not do it. Anybody would probably say so—that it would be the act of fools. I seem to feel myself that it would not be right. It is true that if it were only once, for one year, and he died, then we might look back on it with satisfaction. But he may live for many years. He'll never be worth anything, and we shall feel bound to go on with it as long as we can. The doctors say that if the cure proved a success, he might last twenty years perhaps; but there would be no work in him; he would always be a burden and an expense."

Here before them were the logical facts, so obvious that one could not avoid seeing them plainly. Here was a man that they had every reason to wish dead. Then surely in the name of reason let him die. Can they denude themselves in order to keep him alive?

Churchill said, "I can only do it if you consent. That's clear anyhow."

Lilian would not answer. She lay awake all night, and once she said, "You wish to do it. You wouldn't have told me in this manner unless you wished it."

But now it was he who would not answer, although, as she knew, he too was sleepless.

He could not sleep; he was harassed by doubts, and yet he felt the call to do it. It had been strong upon him in London this morning; it had been weaker in the train, and weaker still this evening as they sat by the fire talking and thinking rationally. But again now in the silence of night it was very strong. All the past had gone. He had been conscious of this when he entered the hospital room for the first time and saw the man lying in bed. It was impossible to link him with the past, impossible to remember the fierce, gasping brute with whom he had fought. This sick man was nothing to him—a stranger—and it was because of this, perhaps, that the appeal proved so overwhelming. It was the irresistible cry of weakness to strength—"Aid me"—filling one with pity and discomfort, taking possession of one, giving one no respite until one can shake off the thoughts it has aroused and again be at peace.

He tried to evoke clear memories of the man as he used to be, in his brutal force and rage; to stimulate a revival of his own sensations of implacable hatred; but he could not do so. There was no touch of rancour in the recollection of how he had been set upon and beaten in accordance with the sick man's treacherous plan. Even at the time he had thought that this was merely tit for tat, cleaning the slate, crying quits between them. Vickers had been hated only because of the pain he had caused to Lilian. Except for his senseless vindictiveness, they would now have been married for nearly two years; they would have been able to go where they pleased; Lilian would have suffered no discomfort when meeting other women. But that was all over and done with. She herself had ceased to care.

How can one nourish resentment against one's enemies, when one thinks of one's failure in regard to those one passionately loves? If where one strives most one yet fails, how should one hope for satisfaction under the more feeble impulse of hate? For hatred is so feeble when compared with love. It was never strong when it seemed strongest; when men faithfully obeyed it, worshipped it, made it their ruling god. It is a fire that must always be fed and watched; if for such a little while one forgets it, the fire dies down and fades. It is dying now in the hearts of mankind, and some day must be gone forever, whether we will or no. With the breath of a whole world fanning it, it cannot burn for long.

How can one go on hating? It is not worth while. Even to try to do so is futile. One must be sorry for all men; because no man lives who does not merit pity, if we believe that this life is all.

We must feel compassion for others each time that we read our own hearts truly. We are so infinitely small, so completely forgotten, so utterly lost except to ourselves; in the vastness of the universe we are only just large enough to hold a little love.

Next morning Lilian said, "Yes, do it. I want you to do it—say for my sake, if you like. Yes, I ask you to do it, for my sake."

And Edward, glowing with enthusiasm, took her in his arms and pressed her to his heart.

"Lilian, my brave darling, you are better than I am, stronger than I am, and I know it is right."

"I don't know," she said stoutly, "whether it is right or wrong. But I know we had better do it. From the moment that we have thought it all out, we should never be happy, unless we did it."

He kissed her and smiled at her, and said that in these words she had summed up the whole logical theory of altruism.

Then she went about her household work, thinking with a dull despair of what it meant to her. It was the final renunciation of her hope for the peace of marriage, with a settled home and children at her knee. She must not hope now, because that would be hoping for the man's death.

And Edward Churchill returned to London, made all arrangements and carried them through, taking his invalid to the Home in Staffordshire and there safely establishing him. Then he came back again to Devonshire, and felt that he had been a fool.

XLII

THERE were no more trips to Exeter to buy those graceful little ornaments with which women love to make a pretty home still prettier. Much that tends to solid comfort, as well as decoration, was no longer attainable; the friendly apple-cheeked maidservant had been dismissed; Mrs. Churchill was her own servant now, and Mr. Churchill did the heavier housework while ruminating philosophical theses or turning neat periods for his lectures on Eighteenth Century Essayists.

In due course all noticed or heard of their changed mode of life, and many demanded its explanation. Naturally, the first to do so was Allan Gates, and to him Edward was compelled, however unwillingly, to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. To others it was merely necessary to state that their private means had been unexpectedly reduced.

Allan Gates, extorting a rather reluctant confession of what had happened, seemed to be staggered by the idea of remote, if not immediate, consequences. He rubbed his nose with unusual vigour, and when Lilian came in and out the room, he glanced at her ruefully.

"I almost wish," he said, "that you had consulted me about it."

"Yes," said Edward, "I think perhaps I ought to have done so. I consulted her, of course. I have acted with her approval."

"Of course."

"You think—you don't approve, Allan?"

"My dear old boy, I don't know what to think. It does seem rather a tall order for both of you."

But Allan knew what to think in a day or two, and by that time the order had ceased to be too tall for him.

He said, "It is fine. It is a gloriously Christian sacrifice. Edward, if you had honoured me by asking my advice, I should have urged you to do it."

"You would really, Allan?"

"Yes, but I should have claimed then what I claim now—to take my share in it. You can't refuse."

And with much eagerness he tried to prevail on his friend to permit him to carry some part of the burden that they had taken up. He said that he had put by money, not much, but a nice little hoard, nearly a hundred pounds, and for this he had no possible use. Why, then, might it not go towards the maintenance of Mr. Vickers?

"I have no relatives, nobody with any claim on me; the money is quite my own. I have every right to do what I please with it, and nothing will please me so much as this."

But when Edward said that Allan must keep his small capital intact for some emergency personal to himself, he was forced to own that he had no private income of any sort.

"Why should I want money? I have never given money a thought. As I say, there is no one dependent on me. My stipend here is bigger than I require. That's the reason why I have made savings; and I shall go on making them."

He was genuinely grieved by his friend's obdurate refusal.

One of the people who asked troublesome questions and offered an active sympathy that had not been invited was a member of the Burnage family, Mrs. Draycott. This was the tall lady with large eyes, spoken of by her relatives indifferently as Mrs. William and Daphne. One could not help being sorry for Daphne, because obviously, as Mr. Edrick had said, she was not very wise, and, as she said herself, she was unhappy; but, suffering from the vapid, empty character of a life that her money, her fine garments, and even her headaches, could not fill, she allowed herself to lean heavily on others, and, if the truth must be told, to bore them excessively. She had leant upon Edward Churchill, and, sorry as he felt for her, he could not escape from feeling bored also. Indeed Daphne developed from being a bore until she was an absolute worry to him.

Struck by one of his lectures, she asked for help about books. She visited the Men's Library at inconvenient hours, she marked the margins of pages and underlined long passages, she wrote him little notes telling him to bring more books to the Burnage mansion and discuss them there with her quietly. He would have thus assisted anybody, and of course he must hold his leisure at the disposal of Daphne as a member of the family; requests from such a quarter were somewhat in the nature of orders. He obeyed the orders as far and as punctually as he could.

When he carried the books to the big house, she wasted a lot of time by talking of everything except the books themselves, although that was what he had come for. She used to receive him in a small boudoir which appeared to be her own special retreat, although that jolly, healthy Miss Adela sometimes came prancing in and out, seeming to bring a breath of fresh air with her and making Mrs. William close her eyes wearily. Mrs. William was so woefully tired of all commonplace phenomena. She would rise from some deep chair or couch to welcome the visitor, and then subside into a graceful attitude, seated on the arm of a chair or reclining against a piano. At home she wore loose hanging robes, and she herself was floppy. She would hold a bunch of roses to her long nose, and raise her dark eyes above them, and tell him that flowers were the most beautiful things in a very ugly world. He agreed, and promptly unstrapped his parcel of books.

"Thank you;" and she gave him the roses to smell, and then laid them on her lap.

She desired his help. What she wanted to know was, Did he think it was too late for her to open her mind? She herself thought that literature might be a solace. She might become an author. She said that if she wrote the story of her own life, it would be the most wonderful book ever written. "One day I shall have to tell you my life. *You* will understand it. I knew from the beginning that you were sympathetic."

With gentle tact Churchill postponed the day on which he was to hear the story of Mrs. William's life. In fact that day was never coming. If she really had need of disburdening herself in this manner, he must refer her to Allan Gates. Confessions belonged to his department.

But Daphne was fond of confidences, and if she might not herself confide, she asked other people to confide in her. Soon she invited Edward to a friendly confidential exercise. With a prelude of apology, she asked him if he was happy in his married life. When he replied that he was absolutely happy she said she was very glad.

"It has been on my mind. I don't know why. My own bitter experience, perhaps, makes me look for that explanation whenever I think people are not happy."

She accepted his assurance, and yet, at a later period, this strange idea must have come upon her mind again, because she passed it on to Mr. Edrick.

She told Churchill she felt sure there had been a tragedy in his life. "Tell me what it is. Trust me."

He parried all such questions. "I am thirty-four," he said, smiling. "It would be odd if there had been no trouble or sorrow in my life, but there is nothing of the least interest. From an ordinary point of view, my life has been uneventful."

"Ah," she said, wearily closing her eyes, "you won't trust me. I think you are wrong."

And she sent him a copy of verses on the subject of Trustfulness, and seemed willing that he should suppose they were her own composition. He did not suppose it; because, bad as the verses were, they would have been worse if they had come, as children say, out of Mrs. William's own head.

She soon gave up the notion of becoming an author, but she did not abandon her new interest in literature, and she presently asked Edward for some volumes on metaphysics, and was disappointed when he said there were none in the Library. She said he must make a list of very superior books, and she would buy them next time she went to London and present them to the Library.

She was often away from Lipsford, going to London for relaxation, or to Harrogate and Buxton for the good of her health. She said she adored London. "To me it is so wonderful, so different from anywhere else. But I feel alone there—alone in a crowd. I take Mrs. Prince with me, but she does not count. She is no companion. There is no one there like you, with whom I can exchange ideas. When I have been looking at beautiful pictures or listening to exquisite music, I want to remain silent, for quite a long time; but after that I want to utter all my thoughts and have them understood in a moment. It is the same thing as the theatre. I am lifted out of myself; but afterwards comes the longing for sympathy, for comprehension. I am afraid I am very unconventional, but only a man's intellect is strong enough to give the communion of spirit that we poor women need in our highest moment. . . . Mrs. Prince—well, you know what Mrs. Prince is."

Mrs. Prince was one of the nondescript middle-aged ladies who were connected with or adopted by the Burnage family, wife to the large man, and, although Edward did not really know much of her, he could understand that she would necessarily fail as recipient of Daphne's vapourings about art and the drama. Mrs. Prince was altogether too domestic and prosaic.

One winter afternoon when Daphne had returned from London, after a round of gaiety, she came straight to the Library, and Lilian happened to meet her there. Daphne had brought books, and they were spread out on the big table in the middle of the room for Churchill's examination. Daphne, dressed in rich furs, with a bunch of Parma violets at her neck, sat upon the edge of the table in a graceful attitude, while Edward, leaning on the far side of the table, pored over the new volumes. There was nobody else in the place, until Lilian appeared. When she came in Edward stood up, and, the table suddenly tilting, Mrs. William nearly sat down upon the floor. The new books followed her in a cataract. It was really rather ridiculous, because Mrs. William had been cut short and nearly upset in the midst of quite a high flight of eloquence; but, recovering equilibrium, she preserved her full dignity and did not seem at all confused.

"Your husband is quite wonderful," she said. "There is nothing that he has not read, and nothing that he cannot understand. I am sure you must be very proud of him."

Lilian replied rather stiffly to these compliments. The fact was she had heard too many of them, and for her own reasons she could not support them any longer with perfect equanimity. In the early days Mrs. William had called at the cottage two or three times, but Lilian did not take to her very kindly even then. Mrs. William's languishing grace and slow, graceful gestures failed to charm, and the compliments to Edward, who was not present on these occasions, soon began to pall. One's pride in those one loves is not a matter that one can easily discuss with fresh acquaintances, nor does one ordinarily enjoy having the duties that love commands pointed out to one by strangers.

"I shall come to hear you on Thursday," said Mrs. William, shaking out her furs and readjusting her violets. "The usual time, I suppose. Eight o'clock."

Other members of the family went to Edward's evening lectures at the Institute at long intervals, as a politeness or for business purposes—Mr. Gordon, to make sure that the lighting arrangements were satisfactory, without danger of fire; Mr. Edrick, perhaps to ascertain that the discourse did not trench upon political economy or contain any ideas of an unsettling nature. But Mrs. William went always when she was in Lipsford, as if to a great treat, glad to renounce her dinner for a lecture. Lilian several times saw her there, sitting always in the same chair, looking very grand with her big hat and velvet cloak, sniffling at a bottle of salts, half closing her eyes and opening them prodigiously. When the lecture was over she always said it had been "wonderful." She said this to Mr. Gates, to the overseers, to anybody; and she said to Edward, if she got near enough, that it had taken her out of herself, and she wished it hadn't stopped so soon.

Allan Gates, at supper with the Churchills one evening after a lecture, said facetiously, "Old boy, you have made quite a conquest. You have completely bowled over Mrs. William."

The kindest people say the wrong thing sometimes, and poor Allan said it then.

Lilian did not care for his remark; she could not see any joke in it, and after he had gone she told Edward her opinion of Mrs. William quite seriously.

"I dislike her very much, and I hope you'll never give her the very least encouragement."

"Lilian, my dear girl, how can you talk so absurdly?"

"It's not absurd. That woman would come between us if she could." And she added proudly, "I am not a bit afraid of her. But I don't like it."

And she spoke of Mrs. William again that evening, smiling at him now, with her hands upon his shoulders.

"Edward, I am not much to look at—but you couldn't prefer a faded, affected thing like that, could you?"

All this was utterly absurd, but it was none the less annoying. Edward was no better pleased with Allan's silly attempt at a joke than Lilian had been. Before this he had often felt a certain constraint and awkwardness in Mrs. William's company, and henceforth these sensations were accentuated by recalling Lilian's extraordinary and unique flash of jealous doubt. Everything chivalrous in his nature recoiled from admitting for a moment that there might be a shadow of substance to justify the imputation against the unfortunate and embarrassing Daphne. But the thought of how easily people and things can be misinterpreted rendered him uncomfortable, and gave Daphne power to be for a time a real worry.

Then, fortunately, she went to Harrogate again.

It was when she came back to Lipsford that she heard of the altered circumstances of the Churchills and rushed to their rescue. That she meant well no one could doubt, but really she was silly and precipitate in jumping to such large conclusions. She seemed to think that the poor souls' need was so great that even their daily bread might be in jeopardy, and, eager to alleviate their more immediate distress, she arrived at the cottage with a parcel of provisions in her hands and a consignment of tinned fruit on the front seat of the carriage. One of the gardeners from the big house followed with an immense hamper of vegetables.

"There," she said breathlessly to Lilian. "Now tell me everything about it. I *am* sorry. I never slept a wink last night, from thinking about it. *What* has happened?"

It was very difficult to satisfy her sympathetic questionings; or to persuade her to believe that they were not hungry, and that, even if famished, they could never eat so many vegetables.

"But," said Daphne, "vegetables are invaluable if you know all you can do with them. I do not know myself—I am so ignorant. But Ethel Prince knows. I will bring Ethel Prince."

Then Daphne and Mrs. Prince came together; and Mrs. Prince, in a quiet, bustling, capable way, told Lilian that it was a mistake to suppose that man is really or necessarily a meat-eater. Vast geographical tracts are peopled with races who scarcely ever touch meat. The best doctors are now agreed that we Britons eat too much meat. She herself had for some time been leading her husband, Mr. Prince, towards the vegetarian habit; and, although as a person of large frame not free from prejudices, he hung back a little, he was already better, yes, *better,* for her treatment. He was less inclined to be drowsy, more talkative after his meals.

"Believe me," she said, "Mr. Churchill will not suffer by the change. To one of his ascetic temperament and energetic, intelligent character, it will come as a revelation."

And she proposed, if Lilian permitted, to demonstrate there and then how easy it was to make three kinds of nourishing cabbage soup and one appetising tomato *ragout.*

Lilian submitted to this lesson, but, being so very anxious to get rid of her visitors at the time and to escape more visits from them in the future, she perhaps did not show adequate pleasure or offer as gracious thanks as had been expected. Mrs. Prince had rather a huffy air at the end of the lesson, and she told Daphne afterwards that Mrs. Churchill was a stuck-up, foolish person.

"I don't know what she may have been, but she thinks herself above her station," said Mrs. Prince. "She is useless in a house. If you wish to assist them, you'll have to do it through the husband."

Daphne was already trying to assist Edward with something more substantial than cabbage soups. She made a proposal to him that the counsel and guidance he had so freely given her should now be continued in a regular, businesslike manner; that they should become teacher and pupil; and that he should accept a handsome remuneration for a course of interviews—say, three afternoons a week, an hour at a time, at hours convenient to himself.

He told her that this was impossible. He was already in receipt of a sufficient payment for all his services to the community.

"Indeed you are not," said Daphne, with indignation. "It is a beggarly pittance. It makes me ashamed to think of. I mean to tell my cousin Edrick that it must be increased, and very much increased, at once."

"No, please don't do that. Mrs. Draycott,I beg you as a favour not to do that."

"Then what am I to do?" said Daphne disconsolately. "You refuse everything. You won't trust me—you won't let me be helpful;" and she seemed as though his obduracy might reduce her to tears.

Edward, in dread of such a catastrophe, hurriedly assured her that he appreciated her kind thoughts, although he could not avail himself of them.

"Truly, Mrs. Draycott, we need no help. You are very kind. Don't, please, trouble about us."

"But I do trouble. I can't help it. It makes me so uncomfortable. And if you won't let me put things on a business footing, how can I go on trespassing on your time and your own occupations? It will mean that I must not come to the Library to have one of our talks. And there are things I am dying to talk of."

He replied to the effect that now and always he was at her disposal as a salaried servant of the family, that the Library was a public place, and that the librarian was there to be talked to. What else could he say?

So it happened that during the pleasant September weather of their third year at Lipsford he spent, in following Daphne through another of her vagaries, many half-hours that might have been better and more profitably employed. It was philanthropy this time. Literature had receded into a dim background of headachy recollections. She wanted to ameliorate the lot of mankind, and she wished Mr. Churchill to tell her how to set about it. At Harrogate she had met a lady who did "slumming" in one of the great industrial centres, and this lady said that the immorality, the distress, the general condition of the poor, were far worse than in London.

"I doubt if that is possible," said Churchill. And he told her a little about life among the London poor, as he had seen it.

She was intensely interested, and she asked why could not she do what her Harrogate friend and other noble, unselfish women did—go about among wonderful people, helping them, and be lifted completely out of herself. The family would, of course, object. But she was prepared to defy their old-fashioned, conventional prejudices. They deserved defiance as punishment for their failure ever properly to understand her.

Churchill thought it would be a pity to upset the family, and suggested that as a beginning she might start her good work nearer home. He told her of his belief in a rule of life that made one do always first the things that are nearest one's hand. He spoke quite earnestly, sympathising with Daphne in this her new enthusiasm. It was finer, if not likely to be less evanescent, than other of her fancies.

"Every day," he said, "I become more and more convinced that it is not necessary to run about the world seeking how and where one can do the most good. The calls come to one, wherever one is. If one answers the call one hears plainest, if one does the thing nearest one's hand, it is better for one's own happiness—and it is enough. When the time comes that we are all doing it, there will be no more unhappiness in the world."

"But what's nearest to me? What call? Exeter?"

"No, you might begin here."

"*Here!*" said Daphne, with a gesture of fatigue and disgust. "What can I do here? Do you suppose I should be *allowed* to do anything—even if there was anything to do? Mr. Churchill," and Daphne showed emotion, "it's unkind, if you are laughing at me."

"Indeed I am not."

"Then what do you mean? There are *no* slums—nothing approaching to a slum—here at Lipsford."

"Then I mean I should not trouble about slums, if I were you."

But Mrs. William said she must trouble, because slums—real slums—were on her mind; and from what he had already let fall, she now thought her friend was wrong and that London slums were the best—that is, the worst. She begged him to tell her some more about them.

"It's enthralling," she said, with admiration. "You have seen these things yourself? You have lived among them—in the real true East End of London?"

"Yes, I was working in the East End for a considerable time."

"What part of it? Where exactly?"

He hesitated for a moment, and then told her that it was the parish of St. Bede's.

A few days after this conversation she brought to the Library a copy of an illustrated magazine and showed it to him.

"St. Bede's!" she echoed. "I have heard something about St. Bede's—no, I read something about it—only the other day. I know I did. St. Bede's!"

"See, Mr. Churchill. I knew I was right. Here is an article all about a wonderful place at St. Bede's."

The article was one of a series called "Odd Corners of the Labyrinth," and it concerned itself with Denmark House. There were photographs of the outside of the house and the inside of the house, of people sitting in the rooms, and grouped together on the stairs. The writer praised the House, calling it in the course of his article a haven of rest, a harbour of refuge, and a secure shelter for all who had been storm-tossed on the ocean of life, and saying that, as an institution, it had been started, set going, put on foot by the benevolence of a wealthy curate of the parish.

Edward Churchill glanced through the article, and saw that the curate's name was not mentioned.

"Do you know the place yourself?" asked Daphne, taking the magazine again to have another look at the pictures.

"Yes," he said, "I know it well."

"But it is beautiful," she said. "It is not a bit like a slum."

"No, it is different from the rest of the neighborhood."

"One day," said Daphne, with enthusiasm, "you must take me to see it. Mr. Churchill, it must be arranged somehow for you to come to London some time when I am there. Mrs. Prince suffocates me in London. I *must* have some one to talk to."

She harped on this idea more than once, and finally in October told him that she was off to the metropolis and invited him to come too. She must be allowed to defray all the costs of this excursion, and he ought to consent. He could stay at what hotel he pleased, and she would not attempt to monopolise all his time. But he should escort her to theatres, concerts, picture galleries, and perhaps show her some wonderful places and wonderful people. They would both be lifted right out of themselves, and it would do them all the good in the world. This, perhaps, she thought was doing the thing nearest to her hand.

"What is the use of being so conventional?" she argued. "Why mayn't one be happy and enjoy oneself now and then in one's own way? You never have a holiday. You never get a change."

He regretted that he could not accept the invitation, and said that, as a fact, he might have to go to Staffordshire on business. That would give him sufficient change.

"Then come on to London," Daphne urged, "after you have done your business in Staffordshire. Why not? I am sure Mrs. Churchill would not object. May I ask her if she will spare you?"

"No, please don't," said Churchill gravely. "I could not in any case leave her alone while I was—amusing myself in London."

Daphne half closed her eyes, considered, and spoke with sudden decision.

"Then bring her too. Yes, bring her to London with you. I am sure she and Mrs. Prince will be able to entertain each other very well."

Not too tactfully he declined this enlarged invitation also, and Daphne seemed wounded as well as disappointed. On the following day she went to London, and he thought no more about her.

But one evening only a few days later he saw the Burnage brougham with the luggage cart on its way to the station, and he heard that Mrs. William and Mrs. Prince had come back again. Evidently this particular trip to London had not been a great success.

XLIII

Next morning he and Allan Gates were summoned to the big house to meet the family. Each carried with him various accounts and papers; for it was the custom of the family to hold informal meetings, under the presidency of Mr. Edrick, at which the social progress of the community, plans for future improvement, and reports on past efforts, were discussed by all concerned.

These meetings, as Mr. Edrick said, rendered easier their common endeavour, and he wished everybody to give his personal views with freedom. Often the big dining-room was full of people, and the debate lasted a long time, because, thus encouraged by the president, even the least important personages liked to have their say.

To-day, however, it appeared that the meeting was to be quite a small affair. The dining-room had been prepared as usual, with the mahogany table laid bare and seats ranged about it, but only Mr. Edrick, Mr. Gordon, and Mr. Prince were in position at the table, while old Mrs. Burnage, unsupported by other ladies of the family, sat in a high-backed chair near the fire. Evidently nobody else was expected, because Mr. Edrick opened the proceedings at once.

"Sit down, please. Don't undo your papers, Gates. . . . Mr. Churchill, the business in hand is, I regret, of a rather painful character; but I am sure it is best to come straight to the point. Have I your permission to do so?"

"Certainly," said Churchill.

"Well then," said Mr. Edrick, suavely and almost deprecatingly, "a relative and connection of ours happened the other day to visit a part of London where you, as I now understand, are well known, and there they heard certain allegations—I should say, information concerning you. I must not—we none of us think it right to accept this information as correct until you have had an opportunity of denying the facts mentioned; but it is only fair to add that we have also felt it right to consider and resolve upon our course of action if you are unable to deny them."

"Please tell me the allegations."

"To begin with, that you are a clergyman of the Church of England."

"I was one, but I have ceased to be one."

"Just so. But——"

"One moment," Allan Gates interposed firmly. "I want to say at once that I was aware of this fact from the beginning."

"No," said Churchill. "You forget, Allan. I did not tell you till after I had been here for a long time."

"But I guessed it," said Gates.

"Oh, you guessed it, Gates?" said Mr. Edrick. "But you did not think it necessary to tell me or any of us?"

"No," said Gates, very firmly. "Why should I? It did not concern you or any of us. It was entirely Churchill's own affair. He was coming here to perform secular duties, and he has performed them admirably. I had every confidence in him, and my confidence has been thoroughly justified."

Mr. Edrick looked at his brother, and then again at Gates. "On the whole," he said mildly and courteously, "I think you may not have been wrong in taking that view. No, all things considered, I do not know that this circumstance greatly concerned us; although naturally we should have preferred to know the exact status of any one with whom we were brought into close relations."

Old Mrs. Burnage was taking no part in the proceedings, but she had said something to herself in a grumbling tone, and all turned toward her for a moment. Mr. Edrick seemed to interpret her slight disturbance as a hint to abridge the talk and get to business.

Deprecatingly then, but without unnecessary phrases, he asked Churchill if it was true that the lady he had brought among them as his wife was not in fact his wife for the strongest of all reasons, because she was the wife of somebody else.

"Yes," said Edward, "that is true, in the sense that you attach to your question. The bond between us has not been ratified by law. It is none the less indissoluble."

"Well then, that being so, we feel that we have no alternative but to ask you to vacate your appointment."

"No doubt," said Edward, "you are right from your point of view. Please consider the appointment vacated."

Mr. Edrick seemed to be relieved.

"You see our difficulty. We make no reproaches. We very much regret the unfortunate circumstances of the situation, and we understand that, as you were placed, it was not easy for you to explain them to us; but you would perhaps have understood—had you thought of it—that our reception of the lady we supposed to be Mrs. Churchill must have been different—and that it was not fair to leave us under a misapprehension."

"No, from your point of view it was not fair."

"You do see that now," and Mr. Edrick looked still more relieved. "I put it to you as a man of the world——"

"I am not a man of the world," said Edward; "but I think no more need be said. You wish us to go. We will go without delay." He had risen to his feet, and he bowed gravely. "On behalf of both of us I beg to thank you all for much kindness, and I am sorry if some of it has been given to us by mistake."

But then Allan Gates interposed hotly. He said that the point of view of the family was not a Christian point of view; that if his friend was not a man of the world, he was something far better; that he and the lady who was his wife in everything but name had led the most admirable life that had ever been seen in Lipsford. All married couples might take it as a model for imitation, and it was monstrous and cruel to turn them out as if in disgrace.

"Gently, my dear Gates, gently," said Mr. Edrick. "There is no question of disgrace—certainly not. Your friend himself admits our difficulty. Surely you, too, must see that we cannot countenance what in a larger community might perhaps be of much less consequence. It is the example. What we seem to countenance we must be held to approve. We have many young men and women in our charge. This lady goes about among the work-girls. They admire her and are naturally subject to her influence."

"Do you think," asked Churchill, "she has done them any harm?"

"No," said Mr. Gordon, "far from it. My brother had no wish, as I know, to give an impression that any of us doubt that. No, believe me, Mr. Churchill, it is to our great regret that we are losing you both. You have both endeared yourselves to many here."

Then Mrs. Burnage began to talk, as if to herself, rather than to the company. "He ought not to have brought her here—not into this house!" and she went on grumblingly. "It has never happened before—except once, when they brought the actress who played Lady Macbeth at Exeter. That was in my husband's time."

"No, no," continued Mr. Gordon hurriedly. "Much regret, I assure you; but, as my brother has indicated, we are not really free agents in the matter. We have responsibilities."

"Very well," said Allan Gates. He, too, had risen from his chair, and he came and stood by his friend's side near the door. "If they go, I go with them. Please accept my resignation also."

"That," said Mr. Edrick, "would be a thousand pities, Gates."

"Yes," said Mr. Gordon. "Really, Gates you must not think of such a course."

"Allan," said Edward Churchill appealingly, "don't, please. For my sake, don't."

"No, no," said Mr. Edrick, "we simply won't consider such a course."

"Why not?" said Gates, very warmly. "*You* have taken a course. Then I take *mine*. I refuse to countenance what I consider a dangerous example of narrow-mindedness and ingratitude. I protest against your treatment of this man and this woman as unjust, ungrateful and unchristian."

The dark cheeks of Allan Gates were fiery red and his eyes blazed as he made his protest. Mr. Edrick was greatly perturbed by it, and murmured deprecatingly; Mr. Prince shook his head in sign of solemn negation; and Mr. Gordon looked apprehensively towards the big chair by the fire. But old Mrs. Burnage was quite undisturbed. She did not seem to have noticed Allan's rather noisy outburst, and presently one heard her speak to herself as if pursuing a long train of thought.

"If I had known," she said, "I should not have given her a nosegay."

Outside in the hall Daphne was waiting for Churchill. She seized his hand and clung to him. Her eyes had red circles round them, her long nose was swollen by weeping, she spoke hysterically and breathlessly.

"It is not my fault. Dear Mr. Churchill, do believe me. I am not to blame."

"No," he said gently and kindly, "of course not. No one is to blame except myself."

"It is Mrs. Prince," said Daphne, with a gasp. "I hate her. I'll never speak to her again. We went to Denmark House—your wonderful House that you gave them. You gave them all your money. And they love you there. They pray for you. And I think there's nobody like you. I have told Edrick. I have told them all that none of them here are fit to black your boots. . . . But the matron of the House told us something about *her*—and Ethel Prince insisted on going to other places, making further inquiries, until she found out everything. I tried to prevent her. . . . Oh, why didn't you trust me? If you had trusted me, I should have been on my guard, and this wouldn't have happened;" and she burst into hysterical sobbing.

"Daphne," said Mr. Edrick, coming from the dining-room; "Daphne. This is not very becoming. I beg of you to control yourself;" and he and Mr. Prince released Churchill from her embrace, and led her away still sobbing.

Allan Gates and Edward Churchill, carrying their unopened papers, walked through the gardens and down the park-like slope towards the river and the clustered roofs. The sun was shining on the pleasant meadows and the terraced hill; never had their valley looked prettier or more restful.

And Edward, thinking of his friend, said to himself, "He loves it. He is happy here. He has made it his home. But for me, he would stay here to the end of his life."

And, speaking aloud, he reproached Allan for wishing to make a quite unnecessary sacrifice, and urged him to withdraw his resignation. The family would be quick to pardon a few hasty and ill-considered words, and eager to retain his services.

"Allan, please do it—for my sake. I should never forgive myself for bringing this trouble upon you."

"I shouldn't forgive myself either. Dear old boy, I am following your own rule. How often have you told me?—self has its rights. I am doing it for my own sake. Besides, I had to make my protest—to make it as strong as I could, so that all might understand it."

"But, Allan, did you believe all that you said to them? Did you really think that they were acting so improperly?"

"Of course I did. . . . Oh, I don't know." And for a moment he had his expression of childlike ruefulness. "I can't analyse too closely. They made me very angry. Don't let's speak of it again. Let us think of what we are all to do."

Indeed the outlook, so far as Lilian and Edward were concerned, could not be considered as cheerful. They had lost their job. They were out of work and almost penniless.

"I think," Allan went on, "what we had better do is to go first of all to Danesborough. I am sure they'll take me on again there. There is always room there for another curate. We shall have plenty of time there to look round, and see what is best for all of us." As he talked, he became gay again, snapping his fingers, and stepping out briskly. "Remember, we have a nice little nest egg—the money you wouldn't use. We'll use it now, till we get going again."

"Allan, you speak of 'we' and 'us,' when you ought to say 'I.' Lilian and I can fend for ourselves. We are not going to hang upon you."

"No, you are not. But you are coming with me. We are going into the wilderness together."

During the afternoon Edward Churchill once more attempted to dissuade his friend from abandoning the happy valley; but Gates scarcely listened to these further arguments. He was busily packing at his beloved parsonage. He had already stripped the "book-room," and he moved to and fro in the midst of confusion, pulling about boxes, piling things in small heaps, talking to his servant and talking to himself with the utmost cheeriness. "This pile is to be burnt. . . . That is a present for Mr. Madge. He is coming to fetch it. . . . My fishing-boots! Shall I ever require them? No, I think I will give my fishing-boots to old John Venning. Yes, for Venning—the boots. That settles *that,*" and he whistled gaily. "What did you say, Edward? Will you and Lilian be ready for the first train to-morrow? . . . Oh, about my going!" and he stopped and turned. "That's all right. I have been here more than long enough. I always said so—and, in any case, I could not go on living here when you and Lilian were gone."

Arguments were without avail, and Edward Churchill had not really expected that his friend would yield to them. As each knew, it was a comradeship that could not be broken. So these three went out into the wilderness, as it were, hand in hand.

XLIV

In those days the town of Danesborough was perhaps not more than half its present size; but already its rapid expansion had begun. Allan Gates said that since he last saw it, a belt of pretty fields and copses that used to separate the suburbs of Danesmead and Castle Hill had been built over, and the district called Canal Bank had "grown out of all knowledge." Here the new docks had been opened, another canal had been cut to the estuary of the river, and the semi-maritime character of the neighbourhood had become merged in its manufacturing activity. The timber trade flourished exceedingly, and a boom had begun in half-finished wood-work and builders' materials. The children, especially the girls, were nearly all employed at the wood-work as soon as they left school. A large trade in fish was also developing itself, while the old trades of woollen goods, cement, and carpets more than held their own, increasing their smoke-cloud and swallowing fresh acreage in a most satisfactory manner.

Indeed, from a material point of view, Danesborough was doing well. "With our population of over a quarter of a million," as the local newspapers used to say, "with a system of water-ways that connects us with the North Sea, with our public parks, with the residential amenities offered by wealthy Danesmead and the scarcely less affluent Castle Hill, Danesborough and its dependencies may fairly rival and ere long challenge supremacy with any city in Europe." The newspapers rarely if ever spoke of the beautiful Norman church of St. Peter's or the old market or the Monks' Gate, but these medieval curiosities had always been there in the middle of the town, and modern generations could only claim to have made them look foolish if compared with the iron and plateglass castles that now surrounded and dwarfed them. What the newspapers talked of most of all, what formed a topic of general conversation and excluded all such subjects as art, literature, or religion, was the Train Service.

Danesborough wanted more and faster trains. It made people's blood boil when they heard of new railway facilities for Leeds and Liverpool, or of wonderful non-stop runs into the sleepy West of England. But for the *vis inertiæ* and selfish greed of two railway boards, the progress of this glorious city might have been even greater.

From another point of view, it was a place without a soul. The well-to-do had hearts of stone; the rich were brutally bumptious; the Press, the Municipality, all the public men, were ridiculously, vaingloriously self-satisfied. Every class down to the humblest work-people earned plenty of money, and spent their money in eating too much and drinking too much. At night drunkards made the streets horrible. By day the most respectable people drank more than was good for them; business men completed no piece of business without wetting the bargain; their wives at home in fine villas soaked through the empty hours; the crowd gathering for its professional football match, rabbit coursing, or whippet racing, flushed and heated itself at a thousand taverns before the sport began. Whole roads smelt of whisky, and even little children knew its taste. Prostitution also was rife, fostered by the ready money in all the young men's pockets and by the conditions of the workshops where the young girls were employed. These were regular recruiting places for the army of the fallen, and shop-girls led astray by their employers, servants seduced by the sons of the house, young women too lazy to work, helped to swell its ranks.

To Edward Churchill the place seemed uglier far than the East End of London. There people were miserably poor, and yet they helped one another, were kind to one another. Here they were prosperous, but they gave no help, they showed no kindness. They enjoyed other people's misfortunes; accidents to others made them laugh; if a horse fell or a cart came to grief, men passing on their way to work would not lend a hand. "Ay, lad, sit on th' beast's head as long as ye like, but that wunna mend matters," and they laughed and went on. Nothing for nothing was their motto. They were cold and dour and greedy. Wives extracted coin from trousers pockets while their husbands slept, and fathers thrashed their grown-up daughters with a strap for withholding their wages from the family purse. "Ay, lassie, ye ma rub and rub, but ye wun't rub tha'at oot in a hurry." The only active work of mercy that Churchill met with was a small organisation for rescuing the fallen. This was called the Sisterhood of St. Mildred, and the sisters were ladies of means who had never received any monetary aid from the town in the good work that they were doing. Churchill, made known to these ladies by Gates, recognised them as a touch of light on a very dark background. Nearly all else struck him as abomination and desolation.

But then Edward Churchill was a failure in Danesborough. Gates, who had been almost immediately given work as an assistant curate at St. Peter's, not only supported his two friends for a little while, but used every effort to provide them with good employment. Many people remembered him; and by his influence Edward obtained his first job, an engagement on the editorial staff of *The Daily Courier*.

Mr. Milton Kirk, the editor, was a marvellously vainglorious little man. Everything about himself, his past, and his future, was for him full of interest and emotional excitement, and he would talk on such matters with astounding volubility.

"Big as *The Courier* akchually is," he told Churchill, "it is not big enough for me. It's merely a stepping-stone. I've been in America. I can see what the power of the Press is going to be in another twenty years. The pen is mightier than the sword. The world is mine oyster and I will open it," and he flourished a stylographic pen that he had taken from his waistcoat pocket, as though it were the actual instrument with which he intended to open the oyster, and then handed it to his secretary. "Refill, Miss Jenkins, if you please. Mr. Churchill, I have made myself what I am. I shall make myself what I mean to be. You, Mr. Gates informs me, are a man of the highest university education. *I* have had no such advantages. *My* education was neglected;" and, as if to prove the truth of the assertion, he omitted one or two aspirates. "That neglect, 'owever, 'as been made good by myself."

Miss Jenkins, the lady secretary, admired him more than anything on earth. She had a table all to herself, and he threw her words and tossed her bits of paper, or beckoned her to his side from time to time; and all of it she enjoyed immensely. Her one desire was to lighten the vast burden that the editor carried on his small shoulders. Her haunting fear was that he might break down under the strain.

"Your note-book, if you please, Miss Jenkins;" and he would hurriedly dictate. " 'Mr. Milton Kirk directs me to say he is far too busy a man to comply with your request. . . .' Now, Miss Jenkins, telephone, please. Ring up Sir Joseph Bence and say I will be with him at the club at 4 P. M. precisely. . . . Make a note, please, to remind me to get my hair cut before the Masonic Meeting on the 15th. . . ."

All the office furniture had been made in America; everything in the room was contrived to expedite the rush of business and avoid the slightest waste of time, and yet it seemed that time was wasted all day long. The editor talked so much, stayed away for such a lengthy luncheon, ran out so frequently for an important appointment or a whisky-and-soda, and grew so excited towards night, that it appeared wonderful that the paper ever got put to bed at all. The editor's own leading article was always late; but fortunately, as he said himself, Mr. Kirk could work at high pressure. At the very last possible moment he began to prance about the room in the throes of inspiration; then he would dash out for one more drink, while poor Miss Jenkins sat throbbing and trembling; and then finally he would give off his column at white heat.

"The Train Service! Miss Jenkins, I'll tickle them up about the train service again. Yes. Begin. . . . 'We have never 'esitated to animadvert on supineness and ineptitude, when displayed in high places. . . .' "

He told Churchill to try his hand on some articles descriptive of Danesborough itself. "Go about with open eyes, and record, record what you see. Use your imagination, draw upon your education, and give us word-pictures—clear-cut, salient, *snappy*. As a stranger much will strike you that to others has become mere 'abitude. See what you can make of it—and remember, *akchuality*. Akchuality is the keynote of successful journalism—yes, and of all literature. Look at Rudyard Kipling. What does he owe his success to?"

Miss Jenkins stirred uneasily, and ventured to whisper to the great man.

"What say? The *name!* Yes, yes, that's another theory of mine, Churchill. A name of the right sort—a name of the right sort—a name not too easy to remember, but one that sticks when you've learnt it—is half the battle. Rudyard Kipling! People couldn't get the hang of it at first. But they've got it now. Rider Haggard, Hall Caine—same thing. Take my own case. Milton Kirk. Not much in *Kirk,* but *Milton Kirk's* all right, eh? Danesborough has learnt it, and I'll stamp it on England before I've done."

But Mr. Kirk, although conceited, was not without some kindly attributes. He seemed to have taken quite a liking for Churchill, and to be genuinely sorry that the descriptive articles were unsuccessful. He published three of them, and then was forced to stop the series. The fourth article was already in type, but he could not pass it. He told Churchill it was too vague and misty, all up in the clouds, and without a trace of *snap.*

"See what I mean?" And he regretfully flourished his stylographic pen above the condemned proof. "Where's the akchuality? What's it all about? I ask myself: Is this socialism? Is it Walt Whitman or Ruskin or 'Erbert Spencer? *What* is it? It's elegant English, I admit; but I read and I read, and I don't know what you're trying to say. In one way it almost reads like a criticism of the Corporation and the way the town is managed. But you never meant *that,* I suppose."

"Well, I did mean to hint things were not quite perfect."

"Where's the sense of that?" said Mr. Kirk, with sudden irritation. "We don't wash our dirty linen in public at Danesborough. And what's more, we don't quarrel with our bread and butter either. *The Courier* and the Corporation have grown up side by side. Such an attack—if any one understood it—might play the devil with our advertisement columns. A jolly nice thing you'd let me in for."

Then, exonerating the offender on the score of ignorance, he said he would try Churchill at book-reviewing.

"Yes, there's your chance. See what you can make of it. Exploit your classical education, criticise to your 'eart's content. But, look here, keep in close touch with Mr. Hodson—you know, the Advertisement Manager. *He'll* give you your line. . . . Mind you, this may lead to big things. I've long thought of featuring our book page. If the London publishers will support me generously, I won't grudge space, I'll give them the fullest attention. There's going to be a new era in book-advertising, and we may be the first to open it out up here."

But Churchill was fated to suffer another check and postponement in his literary career. One night on his way from the newspaper office to his distant lodgings he was stopped near the first canal by a young girl. "Bide a bit, ducky," said the girl, and she invited him to follow her towards some waste ground near a timber yard. He went with her silently as far as the nearest lamp-post, and then made her stand in the lamplight while he talked to her. She wore a schoolgirl jacket and sailor hat with her hair tied in a red ribbon bow; she looked a mere child, certainly not more than fifteen years old, and yet she was regularly leading a life of sin. When he asked her age she laughed, and said, "That ud be telling. Coom and ask Auntie."

But he made her tell him all about herself. She could not remember a mother or father; she was called Nell Thorpe, but did not know if that was her real name; she and three other girls lived in the lowest part of Canal Bank with a woman who said she was her aunt. Her usual clients were the sailor lads; but Aunt liked her to fly at higher game, and was less unkind if she brought back a respectable prize. Auntie was unkind. Everybody was unkind; and she began to cry. Then she brushed the tears from her eyes, set her hat jauntily, laughed, and took Churchill by the arm.

"Now," she said, "are you cooming home with me?"

"No," said Churchill, "you are coming home with me."

And he took her back to his lodgings, and handed her over to Lilian.

"I can't help it," he said. "Lilian, I couldn't leave her, after what I had heard. Look at her. She is young enough to be my daughter. She must stay with us until we can do something for her. . . . Nell, my wife will be kind to you. Now, what's that woman's name? I am going to her at once, to tell her that you are among friends and that you are never going back to her."

Not unnaturally, "Auntie" took this communication in bad part. Thus outraged, she showed herself to be a bold as well as a furious virago. Next day she found her way to their lodgings and tried to recover her ward by the hair of the head. Then, thwarted, the wretched creature went to the police for help; she was versed in the law, and perhaps had spared no pains to keep on good terms with the local constabulary.

That evening the Churchills were arrested. They spent the night in cells, and next morning were brought before the Borough Bench on a charge of abducting and procuring a girl for an immoral purpose. Both were remanded, Edward Churchill being detained in custody and his companion Lilian Vickers being released on bail. That was all that Allan Gates could do for them then. But at their next appearance before the magistrates, he brought efficient aid from the Sisterhood of St. Mildred. The sisters spoke to the character of Churchill and that of Auntie. They knew all about the street of brothels in which the girl lived. They were prepared to take charge of the girl, and finish the work that Churchill had begun.

The Bench did not like it at all. It was a nasty business, this washing of dirty linen in public, reckless allegations against the moral life of the town flying about, ladies dressed up in uniform and shady ne'er-do-wells making out that Danesborough wasn't paradise—the Bench would not in the circumstances commit for trial, but it said to Edward Churchill, "Let this be a lesson not to meddle with what doesn't concern you."

The publicity that was unavoidably attached to the case gave them a very bad start in Danesborough society, and indeed spoiled the chance of obtaining for Churchill the kind of high-class employment at which Gates had aimed. Nor could Lilian hope now for admission as teacher of music and French in the rich houses of Danesmead, or even the less imposing villas of Castle Hill. Perhaps nobody here would have cared whether they were married or single, but after such scandalous proceedings they must be considered as doubtful characters in the technical sense. Above all, one could not forgive the dirty linen part of it.

A person of this sort could not be allowed to figure as literary critic of *The Courier*. The directors said so, and the editor was forced to agree.

"I'm sorry," he said to Churchill; "but you *have* made a pretty mess of it, haven't you? When I heard what you'd been up to, I thought, of course, you'd done it for copy—a bit of akchuality—the W. T. Stead game over again. Not, mind you, that I'd have countenanced one word of it in *The Courier*. But you had no such idea? Simply promiscuous charity, eh?"

Yet, loth to "turn down" Mr. Churchill altogether, in spite of the directorial attitude, he offered him a place in the publishing department. There was, practically, a vacancy in the packing-room.

"Miss Jenkins, speaking-tube, please. My compliments to Mr. Murtle and will he kindly step up. . . . If he hasn't filled the place of that man Blair, he can give it to Mr. Churchill. It'll be bread and cheese, anyway."

Edward Churchill wanted bread and cheese, for two, and he was glad to find himself packing up newspapers and carrying them to carts, since he might not use pen and ink any more. But this job, also, he could not long retain.

After a fortnight or so he happened to overhear a conversation between Mr. Murtle, the publisher, and a troublesome visitor.

"Get out," said Mr. Murtle, "unless you want me to have you pitched out."

"It isn't fair play," said the visitor.

"Fair play be damned. I tell you I've filled your place. You didn't expect me to keep it open till doomsday."

"I've coom oot o' th' 'orspital sooner than what they tould me. I knaw th' work, an' a'm ready to do't as well as another."

This man was Blair, Churchill's predecessor. Churchill went outside the building with him, and learned how he had fallen sick and been obliged to lay up for a bit, counting on being reinstated in his employment.

"But they wanted to be shoot o' me," he said heavily. "A'm forty-five, an' they knaw ma chest's weak. They think you're younger, an' stronger, an' a better bargain all ways. Well, a'll just go home an' tell the wife a'm *oot*."

"Wait a few minutes," said Churchill.

He went back to the publisher's office, resigned his appointment, and begged for the reinstatement of Blair.

Mr. Murtle demurred, and unconsciously echoed the workman's words. "I'm contented as it is. You're the better man. Besides, I put you in to oblige Mr. Kirk." Then he lost his temper. "Oh, damn. Have it your own way. Draw to-night for the broken week, and tell that fellow to take on from to-morrow morning." And he added presently to a clerk, "Good riddance, too. He'd do us no credit in the long run."

" 'Tis but right," said Blair heavily, when Churchill told him that he was re-engaged.

Churchill's next job was in a cabinet-maker's shop; but here he had words and nearly came to blows with his employer, because this household martinet, after the good old Danesborough custom, gave a cruel taste of the strap to his eldest daughter. Then for a little while he worked as a loader of canal barges, carrying planks. This was a temporary engagement, and he kept it as long as the task lasted. After that he worked at a house agent's office by day, and spent his evenings addressing circular envelopes at a bookseller's. He was not particular. He took any job that offered; but the jobs all seemed to be precarious and the remuneration was small.

Allan Gates was powerless to lift him from the low level to which he had dropped; he himself was very poorly paid, and his hoardings had already been dissipated. He could not offer to keep his friends in idleness, even if they had been willing to accept further aid. So time passed, and Edward Churchill and Lilian suffered what are called hardships. They knew what it was to be cold for want of a fire and hungry because of insufficient food. Yet they were not unhappy.

At any moment they might have escaped from the difficulties of their life by doing one of two things. They could have gone to London, where undoubtedly Churchill would have obtained a better living wage, or they could have abandoned the support of Robert Vickers. But they did not ever think of doing either thing. Allan often suggested the first. "You ought not to stay here," he used to say. "You must not waste yourself for my sake. It is an absurdly quixotic notion, a very *wrong* notion, if you feel bound in any way to me."

But although so dire a failure, Edward Churchill did not remain quite a nonentity in Danesborough. The humble folk with whom he was thrown began to notice him. Whether he wished it or not, he made his immediate companions think about him. He said very little to them, but he did things that made them talk of him. He did things that force men to speak and think, because they have been set wondering.

In the winter time floods were out, covering the tow-paths and hiding the canals, and many accidents occurred. One day Edward came back to his lodgings dripping wet, and told Lilian that he had been in the water. He was ill after this, and, while laid up, he asked her to go to a certain house in one of the poorest streets and find out for him if the children of the house were all right. He seemed anxious about them, but did not explain why. She went to the house, and there discovered that he had rescued three children from drowning. The mother said that the gentleman would not give his name, but made her promise not to punish the imps for the "fecklessness," and said that he would come to inquire how they were getting on. Lilian told her the gentleman's name, and she and others in that street remembered it.

In the hot summer-time there came an outbreak of smallpox in the neighbourhood of the docks, and a great scare throughout the town. The well-to-do were terrified, and the train service was severely tested by a number of prosperous inhabitants who ran away from the danger. The local authorities, who in fact had for years been asking for trouble by not enforcing vaccination, hurriedly organised two hospital ships on the river; but they had difficulty in getting anybody to help. Churchill enrolled himself at once, and served for two months on one of the hospital ships. This was noticed and remembered by the people of the docks.

In the autumn there was a row at some cement works about the unskilled labour men. A union had just been started for them and all but a few joined. One of these blacklegs was laid for by a picket and knocked out of time. Churchill, hearing of this and perhaps recalling an incident in his own history, went to see the injured blackleg and his wife. "What are we to do?" said the woman. "Am I to starve or go to the workhouse till ma man gets fit to work?" Next day Churchill assumed the character of a sturdy blackleg, and was taken on at the works. The men glowered at him, looked more and more menacing, and in the dinner hour of the second day they got round him at the bottom of the yard and began to threaten him. He dodged through the circle, got his back to a wall, and faced them. He told them why he was there. He was working for the man they had knocked out. He would go on working there and taking him his pay till the man recovered; then he would bring the man back and see that he was not touched by them.

"I don't know whether you are right or wrong about your union, but I know you were cowardly dogs to band together six against one. Show you are men and not dogs. Come on now, if you like, one at a time, and I'll fight the lot of you."

They did not fight him one at a time, or go for him all together. Perhaps they were too much puzzled; perhaps they thought him mad; but they allowed him to continue working. They talked about him and wondered. When the injured man returned they did not molest him. Soon he and the other blacklegs joined the union, but until they did so they were permitted to work in peace. And when later Churchill came, merely as a visitor, just for a look-in as he passed by, all the men seemed to welcome him as an old friend. "Weel, guv'nor? Whaat's oop now? Coom to fight us or to teach us manners? Aye, we've had many a crack and many a laugh about you doing juryman for old Ben."

Gradually then people came to know him, and, dour as they were, many came to like him. What had always happened wherever he went was happening once more. He was too strong an individuality not to exert influence; and when once people yielded ever so little to his influence, some among them were sure to yield completely. He began to talk to them. He told them to be kind to one another. "Why are you unkind? Why do you speak harshly to those you love? Why do you ask payment for every trifling friendly act?

Why can't you do something for nothing? Why aren't you kind to one another?"

He preached this doctrine in season and out of season. "Be kind to one another. Nothing else matters." Certainly he gave them example as well as precept. He seemed to be trying to help all the world; he did other men's work as well as his own; he would do anything for anybody who by look or gesture or by numb silence seemed to convey to him those two words, "Help me." And this readiness of action, the swift response and the unmeasured effort, could not be ignored, must be pondered on.

A rent collector of Canal Bank spoke of him to Gates, saying, "Your friend's a rum 'un. I've met his class before —sort o' men who are always helping others, but can't help themselves."

But, in the rent collector's sense, he was not even trying to help himself. He was letting life deal with him from hour to hour as it pleased. He had given himself to the pressures with which he was surrounded, and he was contented in the daily struggle of poverty. He had no regret for past comfort, no dread of coming pain; even in the ugliness of Danesborough he saw no evil omens for the future of mankind. In a rough note that he made in his diary he jotted down some of his reasons for trust and hope, together with his amended notions of a selfish philosophy.

> "I rely on the ultimate salvation of the world, because of the pity and sympathy which I believe are now firmly established and ever growing in the human race. You must yield to them now, because the refusal infallibly produces mental discomfort in yourself. That is why everybody who is happy must be what is called an altruist. To satisfy the craving of self for peace you must answer the calls of others.
>
> "But the calls are from all directions, all at once, unceasing, unappeasable. Hence there comes the inner restlessness and revolt against an impossible task. No man can answer all the calls—and the restlessness becomes mixed with dread. Can I never be at peace? One is crushed by the feeling of impotence. It is like the child's dream of monstrous impossibilities. The

strong man answering the calls thinks, perhaps, 'It is as if I was turned loose with a broom to sweep all the rivers into the sea and make the wide world dry. I cannot do it, but I will show good faith. I will begin to sweep with all my strength. I shall at any rate gain the peace that comes from great fatigue. When I can do no more, I will lie down and sleep and forget.' Then he starts sweeping the first puddle he meets, and he cannot even sweep out that. He lies down, but cannot forget. Even in sleep he is tormented by the first call—still unanswered. This is real and true. Strong men die of this sense of failure, by hundreds, philanthropists, politicians, social reformers.

"And that does no good to anybody.

"One cannot even satisfy the first call. When it seems small and one gives all that was asked, one is still restless and discontented. One might have given more than was asked; then one would perhaps now have been at peace. This leads you on step by step to the giving of all. Give everything; then you can give no more and you will be at peace.

"But blind indiscriminate kindness is wrong—all the world will tell you so. Wait and watch for the deserving case. Be sure that it is a call that ought to be answered. You cannot. That would mean a life of torment, a watching and waiting for what may never come. You will be tortured by remorse—Have you missed the call? You will be sickened by hope deferred—Will the call never sound? Don't listen to the world. Listen to the inner voice. The necessity is *in* you, not *outside* you. Self is the lord of self. If you cannot appease and satisfy yourself, the praise of all the world will not satisfy you.

"Nor need you too closely analyse the needs of those who ask, or strive to measure them. If evil comes of it, the evil is external to yourself. It cannot harm you. You have not made your sacrifice to gain praise. You have not, in truth, made it to give happiness to others, but to win peace for yourself. That is your standard and your test.

"Now, how can you justify yourself for this upraising of self above all the world? By the iron facts of life. You are lodged in the cruel self-prison, and you cannot escape from it. You look through prison bars and see, vaguely, moving men who seem to be free, but themselves are caged. No man can enter your cell and share your confinement. You cannot sit behind the bars of a comrade's prison. Surely, then, each is justified in dealing with his own cell as he pleases. Who else can be the worse or the better? Who can know, who can question him? There is no trap in the iron door; the warders of life cannot peep in and look at him; the governor of the world-prison can pay no visits of inspection.

"Suppose the man thinks he has made a wonderful discovery. The secret of comfort lies in having a clean, bare cell. With infinite toil, with hands that bleed, he is breaking up the boards that make his bed, and pitching them out through his narrow window. Prisoners afar off see the debris beneath the wall, call him madman, fool, laugh at him or weep for him. What does it matter? He cannot pause for that. But perhaps some day other prisoners will imitate him, follow his example; and his secret will pass through stone walls, from one to another, until it is known to all.

"Indeed, in that thought lies all the justification of acting for self. You cannot set the world straight. You cannot act for any one else.

"Practically, too, you may reconcile your conduct to the law of common sense, because you are giving the most striking testimony of what you believe to be true wisdom. You are giving over your message in the strongest way. Do the thing nearest to your hand. Your hand cannot stretch across the world. But the fact may take wings and circle the globe. Those about you have noticed it, stored it in memory, whether they will or no. The man who has cheated you and been forgiven by you cannot forget it. The fact lives with him at any rate.

"Wide ambition is futile. Ambition drops away when you recognise your impotence and cease to fight against it. Give all—and be done with it. Give all—

> and you may then live in peace. Never mind the suffering and pain that you cannot alleviate. It will vanish in the brighter future of the race. What you feel in you is felt by others. There is no going back now. The inward restlessness will not fade again into the contentment of the brutes. You may fold your hands and leave it all to the mirror and the lamp."

This rough note showed how largely he had modified that purely rational scheme that was to be his final code, but he scarcely knew that his attitude of mind had changed and was still changing. He knew that this rough and tumble life suited him better than the quiet and comfort of Lipsford. Things were well with him outwardly as well as inwardly. His only disturbing thought was remorse for Lilian. Yet here again he hoped that all was well. Their love burned so brightly: she seemed to be contented.

And truly she had no real regrets. She, too, had yielded to the pressure of environment. More and more she was dealing with the thing close at hand, without conjuring up an image of things remote. She was living in each day without thought of the morrow. That episode of the girl Nell Thorpe had stirred her greatly. How could one pine for creature comforts or the pretty decorations of life while other women and girls were suffering such a fate as that!

She had made a great friend of one of those good women, the sisters of St. Mildred; and this Sister Maude, a homely, sensible person, came to live at the house where the Churchills were lodged. Sister Maude spent her day at the women's shelter, communing with the rescued, and at night took her turn at street duty. Edward, coming home of an evening, often used to meet her as she issued from the lodgings, dressed in the uniform of the Sisterhood—a grey cloak and red collar and a round black cloth cap—and always he felt admiration for her courage and endurance. She was going to encounter insult, scorn, perhaps violence; she was going to failure and disappointment, and fatigue; but she went as cheerfully and gaily as if to a feast where she would be caressed by the flattery of charming gracious people. He admired and respected her.

Then one night he met her coming out with another Sister.

It was Lilian, dressed for the first time in the uniform. His heart melted at sight of her; she seemed to him so beautiful, so fragile, so utterly too dear for the ugly streets and their cruel work.

"Lilian," he whispered, "*must* you do this?"

"Not if you tell me not to," she said. "But I want to do it."

He could not tell her not to. But he followed her in dread, watching her from a little distance, trembling for her, loving her, yearning over her.

XLV

In the rescue work when the Sisters had caught a girl, got her safely in their Shelter, fed her, clothed her, and done all they could for her, they then summoned Allan Gates to convert her to religion.

Gates was "all out" for the repentant sinner. His favourite text here in Danesborough was the one about "more joy in heaven." From the moment of his arrival he had said, "Now I must gird up my loins. I know what it is, and here I am back in it again;" and he became at once a changed man. He was the active Christian now, the minister, working late and early; so different from the easy-going Allan of the Happy Valley that one could scarcely recall a picture of him digging in a garden or making a trout fly on the river's bank. He conducted nearly all the services at the chapel-of-ease at Canal Bank, and rarely was seen at the grand old church of St. Peter in the town. At Canal Bank there were club-rooms or mission-rooms, and he had meetings and awakening services for men and for women. He also visited and preached at the prison.

But although working so hard, he was never fussy or rattled like Walsden; he kept serene and unruffled in the midst of turmoil. And when most businesslike, the old childlike Allan would show suddenly. He was very particular in the preparation of placards and leaflets that he displayed and distributed in the streets near the mission-room—"Where are you going?" "Don't take that step." "Pause while there is yet time," and so on, in large capitals. He used to compose these "Startlers," as he called them, with great care, and he crowed with delight when he thought he had made a good one. He used to get them struck off at *The Courier* printing works, and once Edward was with him when he fetched out the foreman to talk about a proof. "Listen! God is speaking to you!"—but Allan was not satisfied with the effect; the capitals were too small or faint. He said it was not *arresting* enough. The printer, very sympathetic, said, "More this style, perhaps," and showed him a commercial slip. "OYSTERS! OYSTERS! OYSTERS!"

"The very thing!" cried Allan, delighted. He saw no incongruity in the matter, but ordered his arresting startler to be set up exactly on the Oysters' pattern, and went away snapping his fingers in pleasure. This was a touch of the old Allan; but always to Edward and Lilian he was really the same. Their friendship would hold them together and defy all tests, no matter how often the scene might change or its aspect vary. It had been absurd to suggest that they should leave him.

As Churchill came to know more and more people, he often met Allan in the houses of the poor. When the priest made his appearance, this lay helper gave place respectfully. Perhaps the two men lingered talking together for a few minutes, but directly Allan got to business Edward withdrew; and often, when he had gone, the people of the house spoke of him with something almost like affection, and said how useful he had been to them. Allan saw how his power was increasing, and made him exercise it by lecturing at the mission-room—on the evils of drink, the folly of gambling, and on the care of bodily health. Allan set him, too, to talk to particular men and visit their families; and he took help from him in many other ways. But there remained always the hard-and-fast division of their duties: one dealt with the little, hurried world of to-day; the other's province was the vast hereafter. Churchill would not speak of religion, however eagerly he might be questioned. He referred all inquirers to Allan Gates. It was perhaps a queer partnership, but it seemed to work all right.

The Churchills had lived in many lodgings, but now they joined Gates at a rather better house at Canal Bank, where the three of them shared a common living-room. Sister Maude came with them; and other occupants of the house were a queer old actor who gave lessons in elocution, and a young doctor of considerable talent who had sunk through his own fault to the humblest kind of practice among the wharf-side community. Churchill at this time was working as a clerk in a herring warehouse close by; so that he not only enjoyed the companionship of Allan at their evening meal, but was readily obtainable in any brief hour of leisure. His Saturday afternoons were usually free, and three or four times a year he employed one of them in going to visit Robert Vickers. It took an hour and a half to get by train to the place in Staffordshire, and the journey to and fro made a tedious business—except on the day when Allan went with him. That day was a happy outing for both of them.

Vickers counted on these visits of Churchill, and he would write complainingly if a visit was overdue. Indeed his letters often contained complaint. He suspected that the doctors had lost interest in his case, the nurses neglected him, and so on. Occasionally he said he had something to communicate of such importance that he could not put it on paper, and for this reason he begged Churchill to come without delay. The important communication always proved to be some little plan for his own welfare. He wanted a room overlooking the garden rather than the park, and he wished Churchill to make the request for him! or he had read an advertisement in a newspaper describing some wonderful new electric treatment, and he wished Churchill to let him try it. "Those people here won't do anything unless you stir them up," he would say querulously. "Of course this will be an extra, and it will cost money. But it may be money well spent. The longer my illness lasts the more it's going to cost—and I want to get well quickly. I *mean* to get well, if they'll only let me."

He scarcely seemed to remember where the money came from, or to care. He had never really thanked Churchill for providing it. The egoism of sickness had fallen upon him, and it became a monstrous growth. The whole universe for him revolved round his bed, his sofa, and his chair in the garden verandah. He thought, he could think, of nothing but himself and his chance of recovery. But he was glad to see Churchill; he said that Churchill always bucked him up. "How's Lilian?" he used to ask, and not listen to the answer. "Now, old chap, you'll be glad to hear I've been feeling much better since I last wrote. Yes, old chap, I'm making real progress." He called Churchill "old chap"; for him, too, all past differences were obliterated.

He had not endeared himself to the staff at the Sanatorium. Affliction had in no way softened him. He rubbed the doctors the wrong way by blustering about scientific bunglers, and did not placate them by adding that these reflections were not to their address. When he had a nice-looking nurse his demeanor towards her was polite but objectionable; when the authorities gave him in punishment an elderly unattractive nurse, he lost his temper and roundly cursed her. At first, too, there was trouble about a disreputable woman who used to come down from London to see him. Just as letters from Vickers complained of the establishment, letters from the establishment complained of him. Churchill was threatened once that if this inmate did not improve his manners, he would be expelled.

"Hang them," said Vickers, when gently expostulated with. "Why don't they set me on my legs and make me fit again? Heavens knows I shall be glad enough to say good-bye to the lot of them."

The doctors always told Churchill the same thing. The case was a success, in many respects a great success, but it was idle to expect that Vickers could ever be restored to health. He would have his ups and downs, as he was having now; but as time passed the "ups" would shrink in height and the "downs" would go deeper, until with a final fluctuation the "down" would be so deep that he would never rise out of it.

Possessed of this knowledge, Churchill saw in the unvarying hopefulness of the sick man something so pathetic that he found no difficulty in overlooking any repellent traits.

"It's cursed luck, isn't it, Churchill, to be laid low like this, just in my prime?" And Vickers would inveigh against fate, quite in his old style, till his cough stopped him. "That's nothing. Don't you worry about that, old chap. I do still cough a bit, but I am doing well. I'm better every day."

And he said that he meant to go to the Colonies, and make another career. The old country was played out. Australia or New Zealand should be his ticket. There would be big labour troubles out there before long, and he would soon push to the front. "I wonder when they'll let me get away."

If the afternoon was fine they strolled together in the park, very slowly, and with pauses to draw breath wherever the ground sloped upward. The slightest effort made the patient cough. He would stand leaning on his stick and holding a hand to his side, and when the paroxysm had passed it left him shaking. Yet at other times he did not look very ill. He was gaunt and thin, and the thinness seemed to have added to his height, but like all the other patients he was sunburnt; and when he spoke of the future he pulled himself up, squared his bony shoulders and assumed an aspect of the strength that he was pining for.

"I am *trying* to get fit, old chap. They say they believe in faith-healing to this extent: One can aid or impede recovery. Well, I'm not a coward. I mean to get fit."

It was a warm summer day when Allan Gates came, and they lounged in the gardens. Allan, wishing to leave them alone, went off with the matron, a kindly, sensible woman who was full of sympathy and understanding, to see the newly-erected chapel and be shown through the sanatorium itself.

Vickers pointed at the chapel with his stick and said, "Hang them. They opened it before the plaster was dry, and I caught a rare bad cold there."

"Do you go to church regularly?" asked Edward.

"You bet," said Vickers, and he laughed. "It isn't obligatory. But the matron and the rest of 'em are mighty pious, and we know we shall get paid out if we don't go;" and, unwillingly, Churchill remembered how he had always "kept in with the Church." He mocked now at religion, as he would not have done in the old days. "Tommy rot, eh? You dropped it like a hot potato, didn't you?"

This was very distasteful to Edward Churchill.

Gates came back to them presently, and praised everything that he had seen. All the domestic arrangements seemed perfect; the bedrooms were so bright and airy; the library was a charming room; the smoking-room and lounge were as handsomely furnished as anything you could find in a grand hotel or London club. And what a delightful, sympathetic woman, that Miss Faulkner, the matron!

"If you've fallen in love with it all," said Vickers, with a smile that was like a sneer, "you'd better come and change places with me. You can have the whole bag of tricks—Miss Faulkner included—from the day that I get away."

"I'll certainly come and see you again," said Gates cheerily. "That is, if you have no objection to receive me."

Vickers said that he was prepared to accept any friend of Churchill as a friend of his own, and that, in fact, visitors of all kinds were welcome. They broke the dull monotony of life.

"Very well," said Gates. "Then I consider that a bargain. I'll run over at the first opportunity, without waiting for Churchill."

Afterwards Churchill found that Gates had done what he proposed. When he spoke of this act of kindness, Gates said lightly: "Dear old boy, you have done so much for him, already, that it would be a pity for us not to do as much more as possible."

An effect, perhaps, of the visit of Gates was a letter that came from Vickers. For the first time Vickers thanked Churchill for past benefits.

The seasons glided by, and, in spite of poverty, life was not all struggle and toil at Canal Bank. Their house was happy because of the love in it. The hardest-worked people can always find some little time for relaxation. They had merry evenings when the uniform was laid aside by Sister Maude; Christmas dinners when the doctor and the actor shared the feast; summer treats when they all tramped along the canal tow-paths to the river, caught the little steamboat for Grove-on-Sands, and drank tea in the famous tea gardens at Ferry Port. They helped one another, the old actor getting Lilian engagements for music lessons, the doctor seeking in the solace of decent company and the friendship of two clean-minded men something wherewith to fight the drug habit that had brought him low. Sister Maude and the other Sisters were very fond of Lilian, and, after she had served her novitiate in street duty, set her less sordid tasks; they would look after her, and see that no harm befell her, if Edward was ever called from her side. To his joy, these good souls gave her holidays in the pleasant homes of their friends—the hospitable, open-hearted friends who welcomed her for what she was, and did not mind what she wasn't. They respected her and made much of her as Sister Lilian, and did not trouble whether her real name was Mrs. Churchill or Mrs. Vickers.

Bosworth, the actor, was a dear old fellow, rich in tales of the stage. He had acted with all the great stars; had played the King at a provincial theatre with Henry Irving as Hamlet. What old actor did one ever meet who has not had these wonderful experiences? But, unlike many old actors, Mr. Bosworth did not pretend to have been kept out of London by a conspiracy of timorous rivals. When he came down from his room at the top of the house, he brought laughter with him, amusing them by his tales of theatrical life, his imitations of local pupils, his strange slang. If they did not send him upstairs to bed he would sit by their fire half the night, talking, talking, talking; and as farewell, when parting from them or from anybody else, he employed one invariable formula—"Ta, ta. Be good."

So the years passed, not really uneventful, yet showing no great outward change. Edward still preached the doctrine of mutual aid, but in gentler terms; for already he had made many converts. The seeds sown on hard ground blossomed sometimes into splendid unexpected flowers. People softened at his contact. Since he had asked them to do so, men here and there had ceased to drink, had bought clothes for their children instead of betting on whippet races, had worked in off-hours for distressed neighbours without fee or reward. There was more kindness in the town of Danesborough because of Edward Churchill.

XLVI

Then one winter, of a sudden, he rose from his obscurity to the topmost surface of the town's life. It was said of him in the highest circles that he had averted the threatened calamity of a general strike. The trouble began at the cement works where he had first become known as a blackleg, and the employers asked him to use his influence with the men and prevent them from following the pernicious advice of professional agitators. "Tell the men," said the employers, "that nothing will make us give in. If they force us to fight, it shall be to the bitter end. Their demand is unjust."

"But is it?" asked Churchill. "They are weaker than you. Justice is not always with the strong."

Then he talked to the men, persuading them that their grievance was not worth a quarrel; that except when one fights in the cause of other people, peace is always better than war; that here they would be fighting for selfish and short-sighted ends. "Ask your wives," he told them; "ask your children; ask your own hearts. Lock the gates at dinner-time, when these salaried orators come to talk to you as if you belonged to them and hadn't any minds of your own. Tell them this is a family question and you'll decide it among yourselves, in your own way, at your own time, and without any assistance from them. Go on with your work, and think it over. You were contented enough until the notion of this row got possession of you, and you have known no comfort since. Nothing matters, except being comfortable in yourselves."

The men gave in. At these works there was no strike, and the employers were so pleased that they voluntarily offered a compromise in which they practically conceded the point for which they had been ready to fight to the death.

But meanwhile the trouble had spread far and wide, and Churchill went here and there saying much the same thing to all. Employers and employed must now follow the example set by the cement works; it had been decided there that peace was better than war; it had been shown that there was no true reason for strife. The agitators could not stand up against him; but for his intervention, more than one of them would have been given a cold bath in the canal; the men made him their leader and followed him like sheep; the employers listened to him, consulted him, and thanked him for his good offices. *The Courier* and other newspapers sang his praises when all was happily settled. Great magnates desired his further acquaintance, and said they would be glad to promote his views and assist in his advancement.

If now he had grasped at opportunity, he might have lifted himself permanently in Danesborough society. He failed to do so. The searchlights of local fame had fallen upon him for a moment, and then he was again in the dark; he was spoken of no more in public print; the world rolled on, and left him standing still.

But the incident brought him into touch again with a person that he had already met on one or two occasions. This was a Mr. Raymond, a childless widower of considerable means, who lived very simply in one of the older houses on the outskirts of Danesmead. Gates, who had known him in the past, said that he gave largely in charity and interested himself in many semi-political, semi-humanitarian schemes, such as the improvement of the prison system, the housing of the poor, State pensions for the labouring classes, and so on. Gates also said that he was a devout Churchman. As Churchill found, other interests of his life were literature and philosophy; and he amused himself with such harmless hobbies as the collecting of old coins, old prints, and engravings.

He seemed to be extraordinarily different from all other citizens of Danesborough; so well-bred, so large-minded, so full of strong intellectual life; and he had, moreover, a great charm of manner, with a contagious laugh which at once set one at one's ease, and never jarred, even when its musical peal broke in unexpectedly on a discussion of serious things. He engaged Churchill to arrange and catalogue his library for him, and during this task they had many conversations. It was an immense pleasure to talk freely with such a man, after so long a deprivation from any intercourse of the kind, and Edward Churchill talked to him with the utmost freedom of matters that he would not have discussed with anybody else—even of religion.

For, just as Mr. Raymond was different from his fellow townsman, he was a Christian believer very different from the ordinary ruck of Church-people. Well educated, well read, accustomed to the examination of the varied thoughts of men in all ages and under all civilisations, he would debate the tenets of Christianity with as much ease and no more heat than he applied to a critical appreciation of the Platonic Dialogues or one of Shakespeare's plays. Doubtless, as Gates said, he was firm not only in his faith, but in his creed also; yet he showed not a trace of the passionate desire to defend the details of one and the other that, in a larger or smaller degree, one almost always encounters in the faithful members of every Church. He supported his opinions on all subjects with argument, but he put it forward in the most good-humoured, impersonal manner.

Raymond, for his part, was interested by Churchill, and while talking of so many other things he gradually led him to talk of himself. He seemed intuitively to understand much of his character and his natural tastes. He said that Churchill ought to be more than a reader of books, he ought to be a writer of books; and Churchill, confessing to ancient cravings towards pen and ink, told him of his early tentative efforts and his more recent literary catastrophe at *The Courier*. Raymond laughed heartily over his failure to reach Mr. Milton Kirk's high standards, and said he would give him an introduction to the editor of a well-known London weekly; who would be much easier to please, if he ever cared to try his hand again.

The two principal rooms of the house—what should have been the drawing-room and dining-room—had been given over by Mr. Raymond to his books, and from one of the rooms there was quite a pleasant view across a foreground of roof-tops and smoking chimneys to the distant river and the low hills that guarded its mouth. On sunny days, when the wind was blowing across the water, the smoke clouds rolled away, and then one had sudden glimpses of full-rigged ships, brown-sailed fishing boats, and strings of barges drawn by red-funnelled tugs, all bright and gay beneath an unstained patch of clear blue sky. Raymond used to come into the room of an afternoon, sit in the window, and watch Churchill at his work.

"What are you up to now? . . . Margetson, Bowles, Baldwin! Psychology, eh? I always read psychology with great pleasure, but I have not trained myself in its terms."

"Nor I, either," said Churchill.

"They're always changing, too. That's the worst of these scientific people—each one of them invents his own vocabulary;" and Raymond laughed. "The cleverer he is, the more words he makes you learn before you can understand him."

A staid old maidservant brought in tea, and remained motionless with her tray, looking severely reproachful while the two men cleared a table of its books.

"Strawberry jam again," said Raymond, "and no hot cakes. Eliza, do tell Mrs. Jones to give us hot cakes until June the first. And try to get us some gooseberry jam—*any* jam except strawberry."

"I thought you were fond of strawberry jam," said Eliza severely.

"So I *was*, Eliza; but I am perhaps fickle, and Mrs. Jones has cured me of my love by giving such full occasion for its gratification. We were just talking of the human mind, Eliza. It has its ebbs and flows, its spontaneous impulses, and its automatic reactions," and he began to laugh.

Eliza's solemnity relaxed, and she laughed too—because her master was laughing, not because she saw any reason for laughter.

"Of course," she said, "you can have what jam you prefer, if you name it."

"Very well, let it be gooseberry to-morrow, and don't forget the cakes."

Then they drank their tea, and smoked, and went on talking. It was at the tea table, with the soft April sunlight on the grey rooms and a gentle air floating in from the open window, that Churchill, replying to his host's questions, frankly exposed his views about Christianity.

"But, Churchill, if you give up all that you call the mystery and the machinery, what is the world to take in exchange?"

"Nothing is needed." And Churchill spoke of the natural attributes of pity and sympathy.

"But what is to guide them?"

"They need no guide. They can guide themselves, by the light of love."

"You say these emotions are implanted. But in man's nature other emotions are implanted. For instance, reverence, the religious feeling itself—and faith."

"The religious feeling I believe to be inherited superstition. It is not implanted; it was born of ignorance and fear."

"And faith? The new phychologists trace the quality of faith in the working of the mind in regard to all subjects."

And Raymond continued to question his guest with interest.

"You are not a materialist?"

"Oh, no, far from it."

"You believe that spiritual forces have had their part in making and ruling the universe?"

"Yes, I believe they rule it, and must always rule it."

"And thought itself? Do you hold thought as explicable essentially at some future time, if not now; or do you accept it as a mystery?"

"I hold it as essentially inexplicable."

"And do you more or less adopt the notion of a universal mind from which this supply of mind-stuff is issued and to which it will return?"

"Not as issuing from God."

"Nor from a single ruling mind?"

"No."

"Is it something that pervades the whole universe?"

"I do not know. I cannot think of it logically further back than its manifestation as I see it."

"What are you looking for? Matches? Here they are. . . . Go on. Don't let me interrupt you."

Churchill took the box of matches, but did not light his pipe.

"I accept," he said thoughtfully, "the dual mystery of the two universes in which I find myself—the material, tangible universe and the spiritual, impalpable universe. I can conceive of their both being governed by similar laws;

as, for instance, conservation of energy and indestructibility of components—although in both cases that must be a purely human conception and probably quite valueless as an absolute truth; thus, I can imagine that at death all that remains of spirit in the man returns to or is absorbed by the universal reservoir of spirit, but I cannot conceive of its reconstituting itself again into a manifestation similar to what it has been. Any more than on the material side could I believe that the gases given off by a decaying potato will collect themselves and make another similar potato. I am ready, if necessary, to believe that what we call spirit and matter are but two aspects of the same phenomenon—not that it gives me the smallest notion of what that means."

Raymond laughed. "No, that's too metaphysical altogether. Let's come down again. The air is getting too rarefied. I always think of the old definition of metaphysics—a blind man in a dark room hunting for a black hat that isn't there. That's how I saw it quoted the other day; but I thought it was a black *cat*—not a black hat. Which is right?"

"I don't know," said Churchill. "But hat is better. Cat is too objective—it suggests substantial action, movement, energy," and he lit his pipe and puffed at it.

"What you most forcibly reject," said Raymond, "is revealed religion?"

"Yes, exactly; in every form. I do not believe that God exists in any sense that is commonly attached to the idea, or that there has ever been the slightest communion or point of contact between this God and man. I cannot see that there is the slightest valid evidence for such a belief. This may be my misfortune; but I have not felt any want or unsatisfied craving because of it."

"You have not been conscious of anything missing to complete and harmonise your relations with surrounding nature?"

"No. I should explain that I used to believe implicitly in the Christian doctrine. I had never questioned it. But as soon as I did question it, it tumbled to pieces at once."

"That is curious. What I have always understood as more usual is for men to lose their religious belief little by little—from neglect, the hurry of life, preoccupation by practical interests; so that they scarcely realize it is gone till they think of it."

"Yes. I am not sure if that was not my own case. Yes, it was going for some time. It had gone really before I questioned it."

"Or if it goes suddenly, it is usually because of some emotional storm."

"And that perhaps was my case also."

"But to return to what you said about the implanted impulses towards good—they do make for good?"

"Yes, we are always ascending towards higher things." And Churchill explained his theory of self-seeking altruism.

Raymond, like Gates, smiled at this idea of selfishness. "Surely," he said, "something more definite is required than that? You leave it to each man to build his ideal for himself. But how many men can do that?"

"The example of others will lead them," said Churchill. "If men will follow the natural dictates of their hearts, they will reach the ideal."

Then Raymond put to him the question of whether for most people there is not wisdom in accepting God, if only as a working hypothesis. "According to you, we cannot know the truth. But if we find that the sustaining force derived from an assurance of immortality, and the complete satisfaction of the religious or mystical craving, can be attained by belief in God, should we not logically use the hypothesis until we can find something better?"

"Oh, yes," said Churchill, after a moment's pause; "for many people a voluntary acceptance of the hypothesis might undoubtedly be useful—just as other self-deceptions may have their uses."

"That is characteristic. I have heard it so often from liberal-minded men like yourself, who are naturally full of the sensation of their own intellectual power, and who say religion is very good for everybody else, although they don't want it themselves," and Raymond laughed merrily.

Churchill said with equal good-humour, that he had no sensations of intellectual power. For a long time he had felt as if he had lost the faculty of thinking, if indeed he ever possessed it.

Then, serious again, Raymond amplified his point.

"Take the life of Christ and His teaching—you agree with it?"

"Very nearly."

"Then suppose that were accepted as an ideal and we labelled it philosophy instead of religion, you would say it was all right?"

"Yes."

"But if Christ the philosopher had said, 'Here is my theory of the highest form of life, and I give you as a framework of thought, an aid to achievement, a stimulus to desire, this conception of a second unending life, immortality, and eternal reward'—supposing He said plainly, 'It may not be true, but it will help you; therefore act as if it were true'—would you admit it then?"

But Edward Churchill could not admit it, even on such terms as these.

"I think I see the essence of your difficulty," said Raymond, quite seriously. "It is revolt against the supernatural, because of the harm that has been caused by superstitious people. You won't touch it with a barge pole. To do what I suggest seems to you like playing with truth—like trifling with one's reasoning faculties. Those who believed and yet whose religion had no deeper roots in faith would be, as it were, making a wager with the unknown on the principle of Heads I win, Tails I don't lose. And you feel that this sort of gambling—that any sort of gambling—must be wrong when the stake is a lifelong state of mind."

This and other talks with Mr. Raymond influenced him more than he knew. One or two things said by Raymond stuck in his memory and started trains of altering thought. Recalling one of them, he made this note in his diary—

> "In regard to religion, it is worth remembering that nearly all men who cease to believe in God, etc., etc. (as probably a very large proportion of men do cease to believe at a certain period of life), have received early religious training. At the time when their minds were plastic, and, consciously or unconsciously, they were forming their code of ethics, the life of Christ and the lesson of self-sacrifice was constantly before them as the ideal of perfect conduct; and thus habits of

> thought were formed and lines of action accepted, once and for all, as correct.
>
> "This ethical code of everyday life remains with them as something solid (indeed so solid as easily to be mistaken for intuitive instinct) when the religious belief has entirely gone. And they fail, perhaps, to analyse what their mental state might have been if, instead of ceasing to believe, they had never believed at all."

And a little later he made another note, recording fresh revision of opinions—

> "I think I may have been wrong in not attaching its full value to sacrifice itself as the keynote to the highest life, and have perhaps under-estimated the essential pleasure of giving oneself for others when attributing avoidance of personal pain as its logical aim and justification."

But he clung still to his old rational thesis, for he soon added to this note.

> "If by experience and reflection one is slowly forced to the vindication of Christ's truth and an acceptance of it in its entirety as the great secret—give *all*—it should not be to gain rewards in another world, but for peace in this. The only true happiness is in giving happiness to others—if you admit that, all the rest still follows as selfish wisdom really. If a man wants your cloak as well as your coat, give it to him. Not for his sake, but for your sake. It is the only way of being done with it, and going on again in peace.
>
> "For those you love give all, and taste the joy of giving—no half-measures, no limitations. Give your time, your inclinations, your thoughts, and convictions even—for those you love. It is not immolation of self: it is the lightening and strengthening of self.
>
> "For the honour of the race, for the justice of a cause, give all. Answer the call each time that you hear it clearly, whether it is the cry of a little child, the whispering voice of the wind, or the clash of arms

and the trumpets of war. Give life itself, if necessary. Because life is useless when you inwardly disapprove of yourself, and are unhappy, restless, from not living up to your ideal. This belief and rule of conduct lifts one above fear and all other miseries; it robs destiny of its worst weapons. Kill me when you like, but you cannot hurt me. All is in me—nothing outside me. I am lord of myself, and therefore lord of all."

XLVII

He was sorry when he had completed the library catalogue and his job came to an end. He saw little more of his new friend, but the links between them were not broken. Raymond wrote to him now and then, and evidently was often thinking about him. He called once or twice at the house at Canal Bank, and left books that he wanted Churchill to read.

"With reference to our talk about the Working Hypothesis," he wrote once, "I have come upon something that gives precisely what I expressed so lamely. I send you 'a certified true copy' of the passage. The writer is a learned professor, who, I gather, is considered to be very much 'up-to-date.' "

Churchill read the transcript with attention. It dealt with the *uses* men make of God. The professor said: "The truth of the matter can be put in this way: God is not known, he is understood; *he is used*—sometimes as meat-purveyor, sometimes as moral support, sometimes as friend, sometimes as an object of love. If he proves himself useful, the religious consciousness asks for no more than that. Does God really exist? How does he exist? What is he? are so many irrelevant questions. Not God, but life, more life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life, is, in the last analysis, the end of religion. The love of live, at any and every level of development, is the religious impulse."

The books that Raymond sent him contained the most recent utterances of the practical philosophers and psychologists of the hour. These writers were, in the cant phrase, up-to-date, and Churchill was astonished by their tolerance in regard to religion. He had not known how far the pendulum of thought had swung. It seemed as if, since his Oxford days, the men of science had changed sides.

These books also influenced him, causing him further to modify to a certain extent ideas that he had thought final.

One result of his intercourse with Mr. Raymond was a renewal of Churchill's efforts to earn money by the use of his pen. Raymond, proving as good as his word, had introduced him to a well-known London editor and put him in the right way of setting to work. He wrote articles and short stories, and perhaps one out of four was accepted, and paid for at a modest rate. This measure of success, although obviously not sufficient to provide bread and cheese for even the smallest appetites, contented him; and the hours that he stole from each night for the pleasure of writing refreshed rather than fatigued him after the long day's work.

But gradually he felt compelled to forego this pleasure. It took him too much out of himself, and seemed likely to interfere with the still greater pleasure of sharing more fully in the labours of Allan Gates. Night and day were all one to Allan when there was good work to be done. He kept the club-room open for night-workers, made them coffee and hot food, and if the chance came, tackled them about their immortal souls while they stowed away his Irish stew or blew upon the surface of a plateful of boiling soup. He was "all out" for the lost sheep, the straggler, the obstinate wrongturner who wanted a bit of driving to keep on the direct road to the heavenly penfold.

Churchill, aiding him more and more, keeping him company at night and carrying out his directions in every spare minute of the day, admiring him, and loving him, thought often of religion in relation to Allan himself. It was good for Allan—no one could doubt that. It was the larger, fuller life that the up-to-date philosopher spoke of; it was everything in Allan's case. It was good, too, for the fish-porters and packers that ate the stew and gulped the coffee; it remained with them, keeping them warm when the after-glow of digestion had faded. For them it was an anæsthetic to pain, a stimulant to endurance. You could not study Allan's converts closely without recognising its objective effects upon them. And he thought of it as a working hypothesis that might be useful if adopted by the whole town of Danesborough, till they could get anything better. The place wanted spiritualising somehow, *anyhow*. A place without a soul—that had been his first strong impression of Danesborough. As an awakening, elevating force, religion must be good for Danesborough.

But the working hypothesis was good for Lilian, too. Beautiful as her nature had always been, religion had raised her to a higher plane; objectively, as well as in the world of her sweet kind thoughts, it had given her strength. For her it had taken nearly all the ugliness out of life, wherever she went now it surrounded her with lovely things; because of its dream-glory neither cold nor want nor weariness could really touch her. Because of it nothing that foolish people ever said of her or thought of her mattered any longer. And it had done all this for her while he stood by and watched. He himself, loving her more than life, had been able to do *nothing* for her.

He thought, with immense regret, of how he had once talked to her of her dream; stupidly, brutally breaking into it with his own conceptions of reality. Why must he blurt out his private opinions? Why couldn't he keep them to himself, or hold them close until a chance came to give them an airing with a man like Raymond? He remembered how Allan had reproached him for roughly touching the dream. He must have been mad.

From this point onwards he did more than refer to Allan those who made inquiries about religion; he advised people to seek Allan for religious instruction. He had persuaded himself that this was wise, indeed inevitable, under the prevailing conditions of the town's life. When he had brought about an improved state of mind in some poor lad who now wished to live cleanly and sensibly, he handed him over to Allan for the dose of superstition that would confirm the cure. When with infinite toil he had prevailed upon a hardened drunkard to give up drinking, it was too cold and tame an argument for his limited intelligence that self-respect compels a never-ceasing care for and reverential treatment of this marvellous organism of body and brain; but the fancy that our poor bodily frame had been fashioned in the exact image of an all-powerful God, and that degradation of the one is an outrage and a sorrow to the other, had a fullness of import and a flattering warmth that might keep the contrite but thirsty transgressor outside of tavern doors. Churchill's "Don't do it, because it hurts you" was feeble when compared with Allan's "Don't do it, because it hurts God." Churchill's teaching was awakening; what Gates taught was sustaining. One said, "Don't make a beast of yourself. It may be difficult, but don't be a beast." The other said, "Why not be an angel? It is quite easy. I'll show you how, and then you can't fail."

So the infidel proselytised for the believer. Allan's best recruiting agent was the man who had deserted from the army and didn't mean to rejoin it. They were a stranger couple of partners than ever.

During the October of their fifth year at Danesborough, Allan Gates was often away, sometimes for three or four days at a time; and during these absences he threw the entire management of his mission- and club-rooms on Churchill's hands. He used to return generally late at night, and come with a beaming face to relieve his deputy. "Don't tell me things have gone all right," he would say cheerily. "I can see they have. I can *feel* it in the air." He never said what business had called him from his post, and he took it for granted that Churchill would always lay aside his own affairs in order to replace him.

One night when he had come back in this manner, Churchill asked him if he would be there next day. He himself wished to go to see Vickers. Although a visit was not due, Vickers had telegraphed asking him to come at once.

"Yes, yes," said Gates, "I know, I know. Go to him without delay. Yes, I shall be on duty here;" and he insisted that Edward should go off to bed, as he would be starting early in the morning. "We will speak of all this to-morrow. Go and rest now."

But in the morning Edward went off without seeing Allan. It was very early, he was travelling by the first train, he meant to be back as soon as possible; and he paused outside Allan's door, but would not go in and wake him.

It was still early when he reached the Sanatorium, before the patients' toilets had been made, and he was kept waiting in the hall. After a while Miss Faulkner, the matron, appeared.

"They have told him you have come," she said. "He will be very glad, poor fellow." She spoke kindly and sympathetically, looking at Churchill with serious eyes. "You will see a great change in him."

"Is he worse?"

"Oh, yes. But that isn't what I meant;" and she looked at Churchill more searchingly. "Hasn't Mr. Gates told you?"

"No. Has he been here lately?"

"Yes, often. He was here till yesterday."

In the few moments before a nurse came to conduct him upstairs Churchill asked many questions. Vickers had taken a turn for the worse a few weeks ago, and they had not at first anticipated any immediate danger, but in the last two days his state had become serious. Dr. Ellis would have summoned Churchill, if Vickers had not already done so. Dr. Ellis would be here directly.

From the threshold of the room one could hear the sick man's breathing, very shallow and rapid; through the open windows the sunshine came pouring into the room, almost blinding one after the subdued light of the hall and staircase; Churchill, moving forward slowly towards the bed, saw the gaunt figure propped up high upon the pillows, the wasted hands clasped as if in prayer, the head bowed down as if in sleep. Then Vickers looked up quickly, and Churchill saw his face.

"Churchill! I knew you wouldn't fail me," and he smiled and stretched out his hands.

"I did not know how ill you were, or I would have come sooner."

Churchill could scarcely speak because of his great wonder. Vickers was transfigured: he was another man. Obviously he was dying or soon would die, yet it could not be the aspect of approaching death that had wrought so startling a change. His face with the full sunlight on it was thin and white; every trace of sensuality had passed from it; his eyes were clear and very bright, unblinking in the sunshine, gazing yearningly. He breathed fast and his voice was husky, but the smile about his lips was like a flicker of joy; and one felt, one knew instinctively, that he was not suffering any pain, that his mind was unclouded and quite calm. To Churchill, shaken by wonder, it seemed that this was not Vickers dying, but Vickers born again. This was the man he might have been, the man he *should* have been, throughout the ugly, worthless life now drawing to a close. These impressions were so powerful, and possessed him so completely, that Churchill stood by the bedside motionless and silent, and for a few moments could not hear what Vickers was saying to him.

"I wanted to see you. They don't tell me so, but I know my time is short."

Then Churchill drew a chair to the bed, and sat with the sick man's hand in his. Vickers had difficulty in speaking, so that he talked a little, then closed his eyes and rested, and then went on talking again.

"Churchill, as a Christian, forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive, Vickers. If I ever had, it is more than forgiven. It is forgotten. Do *you* forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive. I never had." And Vickers spoke of Lilian. "Churchill, what can I do? Too late. It is in other hands."

Then he told how by the aid of Allan Gates he had been reconciled with God, and felt the assurance of salvation. He quoted Allan's favourite text—"There is more joy in heaven"—and spoke of God's mercy and infinite love. There was not a doubt in Edward Churchill's mind but that all this was absolutely genuine. Indeed who could doubt? And it was not the coward's deathbed conversion. Vickers was brave; he spoke without a touch of fear, saying, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

He spoke again of forgiveness, using one of his old pet phrases. "As man to man, I want you to forgive. Not only as Christians, but as man to man, let me feel that all is open between us." And he told Churchill how he had hoped that those men would kill him. "Yes, I was a murderer in heart. And I intended, if you were out of the way, to get Lilian back and punish her by every devilish humiliation, to make her suffer the torments of the damned. That was my plan—my hope of revenge. Perhaps you don't know what a bad man's thoughts are."

"Vickers, forget them. You had such thoughts only for a little while."

Churchill asked him if he wished to see Lilian, and he said yes, he would like her to be fetched next day, but he wanted Churchill to stay with him now. In the afternoon of that day the doctors said his state was worse, and Churchill asked him again if he should send for Lilian.

"No—not now. *You* stay with me."

Then soon he fell into a dozing, semi-unconscious condition, and so remained all through that night and the following day. The doctors said there was not the faintest hope that he could rally. It was all quite natural, just what one could expect, and really one should hardly desire anything different from this happy release.

But Churchill, who never left him till the end, would have had it different, if it had lain with him to keep this man alive. It was man to man now. It was not grief or pity for mankind, sorrow for all men because life is so short and death so cruel; it was burning regret and bitter pain because to *this* man—the softened Vickers who had clung to his hand and looked at him with affectionate eyes—all the sunshine out there on the quiet meadows, the colours of the autumn trees, the blue void of the cloudless sky, were fading, darkening, and soon must be for ever gone.

The end came towards dawn of the third day. He had been conscious again, murmuring rapid words, and Churchill, stooping over him to catch the faint whisper, heard him say, "Forgiven; yes, forgiven," and then in hurried repetition, "O God of love!—O God of love!"

It was the last word that came from those lips—love. After that he was unconscious for a long time, and he died just when the birds had begun to sing in the garden below the window and all the world was about to awake.

XLVIII

The wonder evoked by the conversion of Vickers tinged the whole stream of Churchill's thought. Considered merely as a bit of professional work boldly attacked and smartly carried through, it seemed a most striking success for Allan Gates. Surely never did an enterprising professional man bring off a bigger or a more unlikely coup. But Allan made nothing of it, appeared to consider it scarcely worth talking about, and, when urged to discussion, even attempted to attribute it primarily to Edward rather than to himself.

"Dear old boy," said Allan, "you had done so much for him that it was as well to complete the job. It was always in my mind, as something to finish—something that *had* to be finished sooner or later."

"Did you speak to him about religion that first time that you went over to see him without me?"

"Oh, no. Not a word for ages—not till this last month, when he began to ask me questions and I saw that the time was ripe."

"He was in his usual state then—I mean physically?"

"Yes."

"He had not begun to get worse?"

"No. Poor chap, he was full of hope about his condition, still talking of Australia and all the great things that he intended to do."

"Allan, it seems to me incredible. I don't know *how* you did it."

Then Allan repudiated all credit in the matter, and said that it was the conduct of Edward Churchill that had softened the heart of Vickers. "That was my first start," said Allan. "Bit by bit, I got him to understand how much you had given up for his sake. I got him to see into the true meaning of the sacrifice you had made."

"Allan, it had no meaning. We were given no choice. We were forced to do it."

"Were you?" and Allan smiled. "And perhaps Vickers had no choice. At any rate, it was all easy for me when once we got started. Strength came to me in prayer. . . . Now let's talk of something else. I think you had better be married by license. I will arrange the service at St. Peter's. We'll have it in the morning, with the church all to ourselves. Shall we say about a fortnight from now?"

"Strength came to me in prayer." Churchill, meditating on the believer's childlike faith, thought once more that Allan could not have been what he was unless an orthodox Christian. Nor could their friendship have been quite so fine a thing. From Allan one could receive any benefit without feeling the burden of obligation; one could work for him or lean upon him, take from him or give to him—because on Allan's side it was not merely friendship, it was the brotherhood of Christianity which transcends the common measure of humanity and counts no cost because no cost is felt.

He thought of the reality of the effects produced by religion. What else could have lifted Vickers? What else could have robbed death of its anguish and fear? It was more, much more than the doctor's anæsthetic drug. Not as an inert log drifting, but high and light upon a wave of faith, he had passed out across the dark sea. "O death, where is thy sting? . . . O God of love, into thy hands do I commit my spirit. . . ." And the rescued women—the soulless men of the town—the self-destroyers snatched from the coil of vice, utterly changed by religion, sent back into the world made strong by the illusion? And Lilian? It even purified and dignified her love for him; so that, while quite outside it, he had still to this extent benefited by it.

He realised that his quarrel with religion was at an end. He thought of himself. His abandonment of religion was due to two things—the disappointment about his mother and the bar to his love for Lilian. But that prohibition was only the fetters of stupid Church law. It had nothing to do with religion itself.

And what had he got in exchange for all that he had discarded? Nothing. He had originated nothing. Slowly but surely he had come to a reasoned acceptance of Christ's teaching in its entirety as the key to human life.

They had no music, singing, or pretty flowers at their wedding; the big church was empty; not a single nursemaid or idle work-girl came in from the street to watch them join hands. But beams of kindly sunlight from the clerestory windows fell upon the bride, making her sweet face shine and lighting the tender depths of her eyes, as she turned to the man she loved and plighted her troth "according to God's holy ordinance." She needed no pomp of decked altars, no vibrant swell of organ melodies, to make her lips tremble and her heart throb; if the whole church had been crowded with people, and each one a friend who wished her joy, she would still have felt what she felt now—that they two were standing quite alone in the presence of their Creator. Every word she uttered was at once a vow of loyalty and a prayer for pardon.

Allan, reading the service, was like an affectionate friend welcoming his guests, like a brother speaking to a brother, like a father speaking to a child. His fervent devotion, his simple trustfulness, made an atmosphere of cheerful faith that was bright and warm as the sunlight itself.

" . . . The Lord mercifully with his favour look upon you." His friendly voice, shaken once or twice by the strength of his affection, sounded full and firm as he concluded the blessing—"and so fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace, that ye may so live together in this life that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting."

And Edward Churchill thought, "Why can not I believe?" The touch of his wife's hand, the sight of her bowed head, her gentleness, her goodness, and her faith, all moved him deeply. Memories of what she had been to him, gratitude as well as love, filled his mind. While he knelt by her side, feeling all the greatness of love, he felt also, mingling with it, the true religious desire; old sensations were reviving; he felt a yearning for her happiness and welfare that had no limits, that seemed to pass beyond his control, beyond this life, out into immense space, desperately searching for hope—seeming, because of the intense character of the wish, to convert itself into hope. But that, as he told himself afterwards, was emotion simply. It was the love that itself has no bounds and thus gives one the illusion of the infinite.

XLIX

Once more they were people of private means. By the springtime that long account for Robert Vickers had been finally settled, and they came into the enjoyment of their income of two hundred a year. This was fortunate, for Churchill was passing through a period of anxiety and could not do any regular work. Lilian was about to become a mother; her health gave cause for some alarm, and Edward devoted himself entirely to her care.

She had said, when first telling him of her condition, "It is almost miraculous. It is the lifting of the hand of God;" and this mystical idea, returning again and again, gained strength and seemed to take complete possesson of her mind as the time of trial drew near.

Their friend the doctor had advised Edward that a state of exaltation was not desirable, that all morbid notions should be discountenanced, but that nevertheless she must be humoured in her fancies and not argued with. Then he said she was showing emotional instability; and this he considered a bad sign. Then he confessed that the fact of her not being by any means a young woman rendered him a little apprehensive.

"She is only thirty," said Churchill; "and this will not be her first child."

"No," said Dr. Foley, "she told me so. And the other child died. I think that memory worries her."

Churchill did not know if the doctor had allowed Lilian to guess his apprehensions on the score of age, but she spoke herself of being too old, linking this with the idea that dominated her.

"Edward, if it were not miraculous, it would have happened long ago—not now when I am almost an old woman."

"My darling, look at yourself in the glass. You are a young girl—younger than when I first saw your dear face." And he challenged her to show him a single crow's-foot about her eyes or to find one silver thread in the brown masses of her pretty hair.

"I'm glad," she said, "if I still seem young to you. But I am too old for this, unless—Edward, I shall know soon. It will mean that God has pardoned me, if my child lives. Oh, if my child lives"—and she began to cry. "I used to pray that I might be childless until I was really your wife."

The Sisters of St. Mildred would have taken her away from Danesborough and placed her in a Maternity Home, but she refused to be separated from her husband. Their proposal agitated her greatly, and she implored Edward not to abandon her to strange hands, however kind and gentle. Sister Maude was always here, and she did not require any other woman friend. Sister Maude would not desert her.

Indeed this good, sensible friend proved of immense aid, and but for her support and counsel Edward would have suffered far more anxiety. Sister Maude dismissed Dr. Foley from the case, and called in an older and more solid sort of man. She said Dr. Foley was all right as a friend, but no use as a doctor. He was nervous and fussy; and if it came to instability of emotion, he was ten times worse than his patient. This sounded severe; but Sister Maude stood firm, and her action was justified by immediately beneficial results. The new doctor brought with him such a matter-of-fact manner and talked with so much quiet common sense that, in his presence at least, it was impossible to brood upon mysterious dangers or to put forward miraculous intervenings for the explanation of natural events.

"My dear madam," he said solidly, "you are going to have a fine, large, healthy baby, and the only doubt in the matter is whether it is going to be a boy or a girl. That is all you need trouble your head about. It is a mild, sunny morning. Get your husband to take you for a little stroll—say, as far as those seats by the lock bridge. Sit down there on one of the benches and discuss names—male and female—so as to be ready for the christening."

This homely, tonic advice did the patient good. She and Edward henceforth occupied themselves often with the great question of names, exchanging those fond compliments that on such occasions never fail to touch loving hearts or to strike the eagerly listening ear as pretty and original. Should it be a girl-child, as Edward said, he wished that she might grow up to be in all respects exactly like her mother; and Lilian felt that never before in the history of the world had a man said anything quite so sweet to the poor wife who adored him. But if it should be a boy, she would teach him to take his father as a model, imitating him in thought and in act, so that he might become one of the most perfect men that ever lived; and Edward, declaring his total unworthiness of this eulogium, thought, "What have I done, what *could* I do to deserve the love that spoke those words?"

The boy should be called Edward. On that she was determined—nothing could shake her from her decision. The girl should *not* be called Lilian. And as to this she was equally determined. So he yielded the second point also, saying at last, "Yes, you are right. There can be only one Lilian. She must have no competitors."

She asked if their daughter should be given his mother's name, and he said, "Yes, he would like to call the girl Edith."

But then after this name had been adopted she confessed to a fancy for something else, unless he had set his heart on the repetition of his mother's name.

"I did not know your mother, dear—but it is not because of that. But, Edward, I feel that if our child is a girl, I want her to be all new, without a single memory or regret—with nothing about her but hope. I want her to belong to the future, and to take nothing from the past. Do you understand, dear? That's why, really, I'd like her to have a name that would mean nothing to either of us—a name that had no meaning for us till it came to mean her herself. If it is a girl, may I call her Stella?"

"Yes," said Edward Churchill, "let us call her Stella. And Stella shall mean all of my world that is not you."

A girl-child was born to them, and the child lived and thrived. But Lilian lay ill for a long time, as if, after finding strength to pass through so many storms, the respite from pain and the realisation of hope were proving too much for her. The autumn had come before she was up and about again. Then quickly she grew strong—strong enough to face all her happiness. The care of the child was now her only toil. Pretty things were to be bought for the child, she who had stinted herself was to be lavish for the child; in this direction money could not be counted, extravagance seemed to be one's highest duty. Edward Churchill was working hard again; if his own money ran out like water, he would soon earn other money; he would always make enough and to spare, and he told himself that he had no care that was not merely material.

The baby Stella was the light of their life. All the house, all the neighbourhood petted her, so that Lilian in her first outings with a perambulator made a sort of royal progress, stopped at every corner by a little knot of the admiring population eager to do reverence to the young princess. Gates, her godfather, already worshipped her and was her obedient slave. Old Bosworth the actor brought her toys, snapped his fingers at her, and said "Ta-ta. Be good." Sister Maude was a second nursemaid, disputing the perambulater with its rightful owner. And to the intense gratification of Lilian, this little world of theirs not only loved her baby, but all admitted freely that Stella was a *remarkable* child. Her intelligence was as striking as her beauty. She knew her daddy, could recognise his step upon the stairs at an abnormally early age. If she maintained her present rate of progress, she would talk fluently before she had celebrated her first birthday.

Edward Churchill watched her and her mother with an immense fondness. This wonder of unfolding life enchanted him and held him spellbound. He gloried in their child, thinking, perhaps with sudden sadness in the midst of love and joy, "Here is the true immortality, the only immortality vouchsafed to man."

Thus a year of parenthood went by—just time enough for a child's small hands to reach and hold one's heart.

Then their baby Stella fell ill. It was a cold, nothing at first—just a question of keeping her indoors for a few days, but the doctor in attendance as an extra precaution. Then she became a little worse, with the chest affected, and yet she was still "well in herself," as you could see, playing with her rattle, following her mother with bright eyes, taking interest. Then Lilian suddenly took alarm; and the doctor, hastily summoned one morning, said that pneumonia had set in. The child was dangerously ill.

Late that evening when Edward returned from work, it was to find his wife wide-eyed, trembling, almost distraught. The doctor was upstairs waiting to see him. He had brought a trained nurse; they were fighting with death.

The doctor said that everything possible had been done; if all the physicians in London were fetched they could do no more, and he spoke of the rapid onset of the disease and the power of resistance that might or might not manifest itself. He was kind, in his blunt way, and he contrived to make his voice gentle and soft when he spoke to Lilian; but he allowed them both to understand that unless an improvement had begun by next day, they must prepare themselves for the worst. He would come again during the night or very early in the morning.

Saying a few last words to Edward, he showed quite plainly that he himself did not count upon recovery; and Edward went back to his wife saying to himself, "He thinks she will die. Yes, he thinks she will die."

They sat together, watching the nurse move about the room, listening to the sound of their child's breathing. It sounded like the faint patter of rain upon glass, or the flaring of a gas jet at a distance. Lilian could not long keep away from the cot. She crept softly to it, knelt beside it, weeping and praying. And Edward, standing behind her and hearing her whispered prayers, felt a burning agony of pity.

"Christ, have mercy upon us! O Lord Christ, have mercy upon us!"

A million tiny threads that had woven themselves about his heart were being torn asunder, and it seemed that in breaking they would break his heart as well. The torment and the dread were almost insupportable. The night was without end. Minutes were like hours, and yesterday was years ago—yesterday, when the sun was shining, and their darling smiled and knew her mother's face—yesterday, before this nightmare dream of darkness and despair had begun.

Once during the night, when Lilian sat clinging to him, she said, "Allan is praying. Go down and see. Ask him to pray."

He went to the living-room below, and Allan comforted him as no one else on earth could have done. Alone with his friend, he broke down completely. "My poor wife—my poor girl! Allan, it is too cruel;" and he repeated what the doctor had said. "Allan, he does not hope."

"But *I* hope," said Allan. "Hope too."

"I must go back to her. Allan, she sent me to ask you to pray."

"Yes, yes," said Allan. "I shall pray all through the night. Tell her I *know* our prayers have been heard. I *hope* they are being granted."

Edward Churchill went back to the room upstairs, and his wife was again on her knees by the cot. She came to him presently and clung to him, kissing him, holding her wet face against his; whispering, "Stay with me," not repulsing him because he too could not pray, loving him in the midst of her intolerable anguish. The thought of her loyal love tore him to pieces.

The child recovered. In the morning the doctor was delighted by distinctly favourable symptoms. Then, after only twenty hours of suspense, the danger had gone; the doctor assured them that there was no further cause for fear.

Nothing could ever matter now. This horror had passed away from them. They felt like people rescued from a shipwreck, like people cast ashore after battling desperately in fierce waves—lacerated, broken, half dead, but unutterably thankful. And Lilian, sobbing on his breast, said again, "It is a miracle. Our prayers were heard, and God had mercy. But if now you say even in your secret thoughts that you don't believe, our child will die."

Their child lived. Edward Churchill, walking alone far from the town, along the tow-paths towards the open river, carried with him the picture of the child with her mother watching her; and thought, "If I were to say 'I am grateful but I do not believe. I am grateful, but there is no God,' how could it possibly affect them?" Yet no power could have made him say it. Because, first, it would have been brutal and treacherous to Lilian, and because, secondly, even the rejected idea of saying it filled him with returning dread of danger to the child. That, of course, was superstition. But in this case he must not fight against the superstitious instincts. Although one can not bind oneself to nothing, or make compacts with the empty air, one dare not even seem to run a fancied risk to those one loves in order to obtain mental calm and readjust the balance of one's secret thoughts.

But beyond these reasons why he could not say it, there was a massive repulsion in himself. Like all who escape from extreme peril, he felt an immense gratitude; a desire to give thanks so strong that the thanksgiving wells forth of itself and must and will find its outlet, if not in words, if not in thought, then in a vague but imperious need—to thank things that have had no part in one's deliverance, if one can not find active agents. What an immense relief and satisfaction to pour forth such thankful joy to God, if only one could believe. And he recognised in himself the basic longing which leads to religious belief. He thought of how it would have been with him in the past, of how he would have offered up thanks; of the lightness of spirit that he would have gained, the ease that would have come to his overflowing heart.

He walked fast, carrying his hat in his hand, refreshing himself with the movement of the pleasant air. The sun shone, a topsail breeze was blowing from the sea, high clouds raced in a faint blue sky; the men on the barges and working the lock gates had bright faces and gave cheery shouts; a play of light and life made the commonest things seem fine. It was difficult not to think that all the world shared his joy. He felt himself in a closer communion with every one he met or looked at, and he wanted to stop them, to talk to them, and clap them on the back and laugh and tell them that his child who might have died had been spared.

Out by the water's edge, among the tumbled sandhills and the bent grass, he sat listening to the wind and thinking about prayer. He remembered parts of his own sermons on the efficacy of prayer. He thought of prayer, as Allan prayed, and he recalled his own dead feelings, and saw the reality of the effect of prayer subjectively. He thought of how strength seemingly external comes to one—surging up, as some philosophers now say, from the subliminal self, and only seeming external because the marginal mystery of self is so remote from normal consciousness—but real at any rate in its effect, bringing or giving one courage, serenity, endurance, so that common men are lifted by it sometimes to great heights of heroic aim and long-sustained action. That, at least, is true of the efficacy of prayer, making it a force that philosophers say is important. But it is lost, forfeited, if one has nothing to pray to. And he thought, "Then religion must be good, if only for this." And he thought now of the religious instinct, or desire for religion, as something permanent and in the scheme of progress, and not as an atavistic trait, the fading mark of superstition; and he felt that this was true also. Within the last two years he had felt the impulse in himself each time that he was deeply moved. He could suppress it and ignore it; but he could not exorcise it, much less satisfy it, by thoughts of a rational plan of ethics. It and reason could not touch. It belonged to elemental emotion. But if it was there in most men, then religion must be good for them. In his own case the wave of emotion quickly subsided, and reason resumed unchallenged sway. There was but a transitory discomfort; the thwarted sensations caused by failure of a natural impetus in finding its natural issue; a constricted realisation of dryness, coldness, dullness, in lieu of a voluminous possibility of largeness, glowing warmth, and richly diffused light.

Then he thought once more of the working hypothesis. Yes, for the bulk of mankind it must be right. And for the first time he felt the full extent of all that he had lost. Not for the hope of eternal life, but as a sustaining force in this life, how great is the loss when religious beliefs die. And he said to himself again, "Why cannot I believe?"

He turned slowly homeward, and the evening glow was in the sky; dusk threw her magic veils upon the earth, and all the world before his footsteps grew beautiful and grand.

It was nearly dark when he reached the dock basins, and suddenly he quickened his pace, hurrying towards the rows of lamps of the Canal Bank streets. An irrational thought had come to him. Suppose his child had died an hour ago! He hurried on, then stopped, stood still, and freed himself from the thraldom of baseless fear. But he walked fast again as he approached the house, and felt his heart beating as he hurried up the stairs. The child was sleeping comfortably. Her mother sat by the cot, watching her sleep. The quiet lamp-lit room formed a perfect picture of peace after storm. Edward Churchill felt ashamed of having for a moment doubted the permanence of their joy.

He reproached himself for his long absence, for the yielding to a desire for physical exercise, for his selfish enjoyment of the hours so idly spent in the open air. He reproached himself too for his meditations and inward searchings. He thought now that of late he had been weakening. He had fallen into that old folly of introspection, fostering egoism and self-pity. He said to himself, "I have my guide. I have always had it;" and he made a vow, *"I will think of these other things no more."*

L

And indeed he had no time now to think of anything except the hard facts of external life. The struggle with ways and means had recommenced, more difficult now a hundredfold than it had been before, because of their increasing needs. Doctors' fees, nurses' fees, the many costs of illness, are claims that one cannot control, that one must meet with a smiling and unquestioning face. Their income disappeared as a little rivulet that is swallowed by the thirsty ground. He worked night and day to supplement it. Soon he had three people entirely dependent on his exertions.

Stella was thriving. Every day she grew more lusty. She could walk, she was beginning to talk, she had a prodigious appetite—all was well with their little Stella. But her mother was often ailing. It seemed as if a reaction after brave effort had taken away her vitality and nervous force. She was courageous as ever, not shirking labour, but physically incapable of undergoing any real fatigue.

And a further calamity befell them. Allan Gates was ill. This was an unkind stroke of fate that had never for a moment been apprehended. For, although Allan had passed his fiftieth year, although his dark hair had turned grey and his grizzled beard was nearly white, one had continued to think of him as a man of whipcord and iron, a natural source of untiring energy, a mechanism that could not wear out. It seemed a reversal of nature's law, the end of the world almost, when one saw him cease working. He had caught a chill and entirely neglected to nurse it. That was not strange; for when had he ever taken care of himself? Then his dear old face became yellow with jaundice, and he was forced to take to his bed. He lay there uncomplaining, burnt up by fever, but never delirious; taking medicine from Churchill's hand, gratefully thanking him for his ministering care, humbly apologising for being a burden and a nuisance. The jaundice passed, but left him weak and exhausted. Doctors said that his health had altogether broken down.

It was a heavy blow. He himself confessed at last that he felt done for and fit for nothing. While he lay ill, the vicar of St. Peter's—in spite of a protest from Churchill—had superseded him and appointed another man to take over his curacy; and Allan said that this was just and proper. It would have been no good for the vicar to wait for him; he knew himself that he must seek for some easier task.

He spoke bravely—but with a quiver in his voice that he could not conceal—of the necessity of parting company with his friend. "Dear old boy, if I don't get well soon, there must be no nonsense about keeping me here. You must just get me into a hospital—or any place where they'll take me without payment. I am not going to hang upon your hands."

"Allan, don't be unkind. Have you forgotten what you did for Lilian and me?—and I let you do it. I took everything from you without question."

"But that was all different. You have your duty to Lilian and Stella—a sacred duty. Dear old boy, be reasonable. You can't carry all the world on your shoulders."

"I can carry *you,* Allan, without feeling your weight—and I am never going to put you down, until you can walk on your own strong legs. Then you shall carry me again, if you like;" and he smiled, and patted Allan's shoulder. Never had his love for Allan been so strong as now, when sorrow and tenderness were blended with it. He spoke always cheerfully of their future, telling Allan that this was just a rest cure, and that if he gave himself a little more time and did not worry, he would be restored to his full vigour.

"If God will grant me strength just to earn my daily bread," said Allan, "I shall be content. I ask for no more."

The winter was severe, and till February Allan remained in the house as "a useless invalid." This was his own phrase. He fretted at his helplessness, he longed to relieve Churchill of the cost of maintaining him. Then the doctor let him go out—to look for work. He was certainly better. He was as well perhaps as he would ever be in this climate. The doctor said that England was not the right place for him. It would do perhaps in the summer, if one moved him to softer and purer air, but another English winter might polish him off.

And then Edward bestirred himself in earnest. He was not good at asking favours for himself, but he proved importunate on behalf of his friend. He wrote letters, he had interviews with local magnates, he waited on doorsteps and would not be turned away from closed doors. Allan Gates must be taken out of England and established in a kinder climate. He had worked long and loyally for Danesborough, and now the town should do something for a faithful servant. But the town could not be roused to enthusiasm concerning the case of Mr. Gates. This seemed to be purely a church matter. Surely there were special ecclesiastical funds to meet such emergencies? The Corporation looked after their own people, and would not dream of asking help from the clergy if they wished to pension one of their dustmen or firemen. Then why ask help from them? Danesborough suggested that Churchill should try London.

He was, in fact, trying London already, and as yet without any successful results. But there was one citizen of Danesborough of a metal very different from the composition of the rest. This was Mr. Raymond. He gave Churchill time, thought, and counsel. He took Churchill with him to London; and it was probably due to his influence and active aid that Churchill's efforts at last met with success.

One night late in March, Churchill came back to Danesborough with the splendid piece of news. He had obtained for Allan the post of English Chaplain at a place in Italy—on the shore of Lake Como—stipend or remuneration sixty pounds per annum. Allan must be taken at once to London, to meet the gentlemen who have promised this appointment; there is no doubt that these people will fall in love with Allan, and ratify the treaty. And all of them—Edward, Lilian, and the child—will go with him to Italy. They will pool their resources. Sixty pounds a year added to two hundred will be more than enough. Life is so cheap in Italy—they will feel rich beyond the dreams of avarice.

Italy! They echoed the word, and it sounded to them a word of magic. A quite extraordinary hopefulness came to them. Italy—the mere thought of it made Allan almost strong again. Everything will be easy for everybody in Italy. The gentle climate is as much needed by Lilian, perhaps, as by Allan. It will make their child bloom like a flower. Edward will be happy there.

Three weeks later they said good-bye to England. They travelled straight through to their destination, and the whole world seemed to be sliding past the windows of the train. Allan showed no fatigue; and since Stella appeared to be thoroughly enjoying the long journey, Lilian could also enjoy it. Edward, cheerful, watchful, the guide and guardian of the little band, felt a calmer confidence in fate than he had ever yet attained; so that, as he looked out at the vague, changing landscape, he felt that nothing would now come into their lives to disturb them. It had been raining in London: it was raining at Lucerne, and a white mist hid the lake. The air struck coldly and the clouds hung low above their heads, as they walked up and down the platform of the mountain station at the entrance of that small hole in the stupendous Alpine wall which is named the St. Gotthard Tunnel.

Lilian always remembered the journey, and the coming through the Alps. It was the end of their life-pilgrimage. They left sorrow and pain behind them, and came out into the sunshine—into the promised land—into the sunlit realm of happiness. That is what it was to her when she looked back on it, always, to her dying day. They had been sorely tried; but their trials were done.

LI

ALLAN'S church stood on raised ground above the roadway just beyond the last of the big hotels, with villa gardens on either side and the wooded hills behind. It had been built by a husband as a memorial to the wife who died here on the shore that she loved. It was a beautiful little church, lofty and narrow, rich with coloured marble and gold mosaic; on its walls were sixteenth-century pictures in carved frames, the work of pious Italian painters, and these were reputed to be of great value and interest, well worthy of examination by tourists staying at Menaggio or Cadenabbia. But the best picture, the picture that Allan never grew tired of, was the large one in the frame made by the opened doors facing the altar. As you moved down the church, it grew larger and more splendid, showing you the other shore and the wide fair lake with white Bellaggio asleep upon its bosom, the verdant heights of Serbelloni, and the mountain peaks beyond, all glittering, trembling, glowing in the warm transparent air.

You came out of the church into this fairyland that stretched to right and left as far as the eye could reach, bays and promontories, castles and villages, enchanted gardens, grottos of sweet flowers; and earth, sky, and water were not elements apart, but seemed to blend and melt one into another to make a lovely dream. It would have been pretty if you had come down from heaven; it was heaven itself when you came to it from Danesborough.

They hired a small stone house, very plain and bare, but with warm red tiles and comfortable broad eaves, and what should have been a terraced garden, but had now become a thicket of tangled vines. The little place had been the holiday home of a Milanese tradesman, but he used it no more and was glad to let it with the furniture it contained to any one who would take it off his hands until he could get rid of it altogether. The vines rose in terraces behind the house, and there was a path up the hill that led to a barren mountain ridge—a stepped path, very old and broken, with little white shrines for the Stations of the Cross at intervals all the way up till you reached the Chapel of the Crucifixion on top of the hill, where the vines or olives ceased and you came out among rocks and sunshine to the tracks that would take you across the ridge to farms and towns and markets on another lake. And up the steep path in the morning went the laden mules and the sad-eyed men and girls, with the long day's toil before them; and down the path at dusk the mules came light, and the men and girls gaily singing, when the day's work was done. These were emblems of life and its hard road—what the evening of life should be, if we can make it so.

In front of the house and the garden was the dusty road, and on the other side of the road there was a private harbour. Between the roadway and the harbour there were broken iron railings and the remains of a narrow strip of flower-beds, with yellow roses smothering the ruin and hiding all the gaps. A gate stood always open, and naked-legged children played upon the causeway or chased the darting lizards that were scarcely more alive and quick of movement than themselves. The harbour had solid but dilapidated stone piers and steps, with fishermen's boats snugly riding at anchor and brown fishing nets spread out over the sunlit stones. On the far end of one pier there was a wrought-iron lamp-standard with a bronze effigy of the fishermen's Madonna; and at night barefoot women came carrying a lamp and put it in the socket frame on top of the standard—a little twinkling star to please the saint, or a guide to the husbands as they came across the waters singing in the darkness.

Whether the harbour might be private or not, all these humble folk had made themselves at home there. They showed their gleaming teeth in a friendly smile and welcomed the newcomers, who indeed had no wish to interfere with either their usurped rights or ancient privileges.

The Churchills loved the house and the harbour too. Wherever they looked at it, on land, they were well satisfied. Only when you went out on the water, did you see something to make you uneasy. Painted on the outward wall of the pier, in huge red letters on a white ground, were the ominous words that said the property was for sale. Every one on passing steamboats could read the words. This was their only fear—that one day some rich man would buy, pull down the house, and build himself a gorgeous villa on its site.

The glorious spring, summer, and autumn unfolded themselves, and peace filled their hearts. Who would not be contented here? Lilian and her little girl were healthy, happy. Allan, absolutely fit again, was Allan of the Happy Valley. He liked his churchwardens, the two trustees of the memorial fund—one of them lived in a villa at Tremezzo, and the other, who had seen him in London and confirmed his appointment, came out every autumn. Both these men liked Allan, already trusted him. Everybody took to him. He passed from one hotel to another, went up in lifts to see solitary old ladies on the top floor, or sat in the hall surrounded by fashionably dressed young people, or ran down to the couriers' room to chat with ladies'-maids and valets; he was here, there, and everywhere. He knew all the world—the hotel-keepers, the regular visitors, the resident English colony. He was pleasantly busy all the week; and on Sundays he could produce any number of travelling clergymen to lend him a hand at his real work, if he ever wanted help. But truly the work of a chaplain here was child's play. He had time and to spare for carpentry and gardening; he took long walks of exploration with Churchill; and they both used to row manfully upon the lake in a vast peasants' boat that had its own peculiar pace which no power could hasten. A child paddling a scull from the stern could make it go its pace; two struggling oarsmen could not make it go faster.

Churchill was writing again, and the delight of this occupation was very great. Nothing now prevented him from indulging his own taste and fancy; no rude shocks or sudden calls jerked the pen out of his hand or made him feel that the solace of imaginative wanderings was paid for by neglect of duties at his door. He wove a small world of fiction, entered freely into it, was happy there. He was writing a long novel every page of which interested him enormously, and he scarcely troubled himself to wonder if anybody else would ever find interest in it. Then directly he had finished the book he became feverishly anxious to see it in print. This is a fever, often unexpected, that every incipient author feels. The pleasure of writing is so great that it should be its own reward; and yet one cannot write at all without the firm hope of having readers. Churchill did not know how strong the hope had been until he put his work into the hands of the first reader available, Allan Gates.

Allan was at first shocked by the novel. It dealt boldly with such delicate subjects; it was so different from the mirth-provoking sixpenny tales that he had always considered to be the correct thing in novels. After reading about a quarter of it, he let Churchill see his doubt and disapproval.

"Allan," said Churchill, sadly but stoutly, "if there is anything in it that would give you pain, I'll abandon the idea."

"I know you would," said Allan cheerfully. "But let me finish it all before I say anything more."

"Yes, yes," said Churchill, with eagerness. "Do finish it."

"I will, dear old boy," said Allan, tying a tape about the manuscript sheets and putting the bundle under his arm; "but not now. I will get on with it in the evenings. It is, of course, very long, isn't it?"

And Churchill experienced further new sensations that are proper to a young author. All hope ebbed away from him.

"Dear old boy," said Allan, later on, "I think your industry is simply wonderful—the mere manual labour of writing all this must have been enormous;" and he put the manuscript down again. "When I have written out one of my sermons—and that only means twenty small sheets—my hand aches. I have to open my fingers like this." Then reflectively he filled a pipe, lit it, and slowly puffed. "Now then," and he pulled himself together. "I am really going to tackle it. I like it better as it goes on," and he beamed at Edward. "I feel I'm getting *in*to it."

Churchill thought that if by some queer caprice of fortune a book of his were ever published, he would not watch it being read by anybody, least of all by a loved friend. The thing was too painful: it was torment.

But at long last Gates finished a first reading, and then, after skimming through the work again, he gave his verdict and pronounced sentence.

"It is a noble piece," he said. "There is nothing but good in it. Only certain passages must come out. I will show you exactly—I will take them out myself."

Churchill, radiant, with the dead weight of suspense lifted, pleaded for the condemned passages. In his revulsion of feeling, they seemed to him the best bits, and he did not see how they could possibly offend. But Gates was granite; and Churchill, yielding at once, said "Out they go."

It was dreadful to see—Gates with his stubby pencil, frowning and intent, the manuscript quivering beneath his hands. Churchill stood by, like a nervous mother with a child in the dentist's chair, while Gates drew his darling's teeth one after another.

"Believe me," said Allan, cheerily, "it's not only right, it's an improvement. The book is so long that they can't be missed."

Churchill sent the mutilated manuscript to Mr. Raymond, who in his turn sent it to a literary agent. The agent without difficulty made a fair bargain with a London publisher, and before very long there began to arrive by post the proof sheets of *The Rainbow Garment,* "a novel, by Edward Churchill."

It was published in the winter time, and Lilian read it by her own fireside. The north wind was sweeping down from the blow-holes of the Sphügen, making the snow-capped mountains seem to be cut out of metal against the purple sky, changing the placid lake into a fierce little sea, beating among the vines and sending across the olive woods a shiver of grey misery. But she cared nothing for the world or the weather outside the windows; she had entered the world made by Edward Churchill, and she never wished to leave it again. She wept in delight and pride. It was the most wonderful book ever written, and it had been written by *him.*

The author himself was overwhelmed by the fantastic character of the reports that came to him from his literary agent; yet they were supported by masses of documentary evidence—newspapers with criticisms, magazines with long articles, publishers' advertisements, innumerable letters from strangers—and so one had to believe that it was all true. Hundreds of people were writing to the Press about *The Rainbow Garment,* quarrelling about it, getting quite hot about it; tens of thousands were reading it, talking of it, thinking of it; its publishers had but one trouble—they could not get its editions printed and bound quickly enough. Its success was of the full and immediate kind that comes at rare intervals to a hitherto unknown man. Allan Gates was enraptured and abashed. How had he dared to touch such a masterpiece with the censor's pencil? He begged Edward never to tell any one what he had done.

"Nonsense," said the author, smiling happily; "you knocked it into shape for me. I can't explain its success any other way."

That was what certain critics said—they could not explain its success. But readers needed no explanation. It was different from other books—it had something lofty and fine in it that was not quite usual. It was not perhaps much of a story, and it was certainly very long; but through it there shone a steady soul-radiance. The book was like Edward Churchill. You only had to know it well enough, to love it.

And Fate began strangely to pay debts. His mother's husband died and left Churchill all his money. A second and a third novel established his position as one of the most widely read writers of the age. It was only necessary to amuse himself by writing in order to gain more money, but he had more money than he wanted already.

He bought the house, the ground, and the harbour. He added to the house, doubled it in size, then trebled it. He cleared the ground and constructed a terraced garden, with a pergola on the upper terrace where they used to have their meals throughout the warm weather. This was a labour of love, for Lilian; it was her garden. She had a room of her own on the first floor, the best room in the house, with her daughter's room adjoining, and a loggia where she could sit and look down into her garden and watch things visibly growing under her eyes. Gardening was so easy now; you had but to wish, and Italy did the rest. Each twig that you put into the ground would become the tree that you asked for—myrtles and citrons, fuchsias and Banksia roses, oleanders and daturas, the things whose very names are pretty to say, the things that in England have a sound of rareness and unattainable beauty, all grew with a swift, almost a fierce profusion. Churchill and Allan, working with the stonemasons and labourers, seemed to be chased and overtaken by the flowers themselves. The roses could not wait for the brick columns and wooden beams that were to carry them; such common thrusting things as clematis and wistaria seized upon half finished balustrades and ran their tendrils into each crevice of soft mortar.

For Allan good useful rooms had been arranged by Churchill and his clever architect from Milan. They had a separate entrance to the road, and Churchill made them like an English country vicarage, just in the style that suited Allan. The harbour was repaired, and they had boats of their own—a fishing-boat for Allan, and a gig with cushioned seats and brightly-coloured hood that was the family carriage. At the touch of a pair of sculls it glided away, and when the two boatmen sculled together it shot across the lake and distanced all competitors. They had two boatmen of their own, smiling giants in red sashes and blue shirts; but for the most part Allan and Churchill did the rowing. Allan was so completely restored to his old strength that nothing tired him; and their private boatmen had employment outside of the boats—they were footmen, housemaids, charwomen, as well as being boatmen. A gardener and his wife, who did the cooking with a maid to help her, were also native lake-dwellers; another maid and the governess came from England; and the rest of the household was not permanent, but just a changing population that consisted of other governesses temporarily out of employment, poor young ladies discovered by Lilian, anybody known to Allan for whom a holiday without a hotel bill would be like a gift from the fairies. And more or less dependent on the household, were the people of the harbour, who formed a sort of faithful clan and were very particular that no outsiders encroached upon their province.

Truly fate had guided them to the place of peace. Churchill would still have given all—but there was no one outside his home to give to. He offered his earnings, without stint, to Allan. But Allan could not spend wisely, and he would not spend in any other way. There was no misery, no real want, no regular claimants for charitable doles. Allan saw clearly that to shower money on these peasants would be wrong. They were happy now. Money would upset them, spoil them. In fact, the unconsidered largesse that poured from the villas and the tourist crowd had patently a depraving influence—making the industrious idle and the guileless greedy. Now and then one could find a case where with caution one might play providence—marriage dowry for a girl, new boat for a fisherman, school fees for a clever boy;—but the amount was small, the opportunity rare. There were the beggars, of course, hovering about every steamboat pier, infesting every sunlit piazza, lurking beneath every cool colonnade; but to these a few coins and no more might be given, or they would get drunk, fight, and fall into the lake. Allan's congregation were rich English. All other congregations belonged to the Roman Catholic priests, who lived in great amity with this heretic, and would take for their sick—but they must not take too much, as Allan saw, or you would spoil the priests themselves. Italy is not England.

For Allan duty had become a sort of playing at church and at life, as of a happy child, with no real toil or sorrow in it. But he was satisfied, easy of conscience. There could be no harm now in accepting what God granted. This was his reward, and he received it here below—a foretaste of heaven. Perhaps he felt he had earned his reward. God's will be done. It could not be meant that he should pack up his traps, go back to the northern slums, and carry Edward Churchill's money to spend it there.

Edward Churchill for his part was content, without remorse or self-questioning. Contentment was logically demanded by his favourite theory. Do the thing nearest your hand—answer the call—give all. But if there is nothing to do, no call to answer, be at peace. He suffered no pangs because men and women in London, or Leeds, or New York were suffering. His place was here—not there.

He valued money only for the pleasure he could buy with it for those he loved. At last Lilian could have all the pretty things that she knew how to make still prettier; she had a genius for decoration and adornment; and every one of those shopping trips to Exeter that she had renounced without complaint was made good to her now a thousandfold. He used to urge her to go to Milan, or to Paris if she preferred it, to get herself more new dresses, more new hats; and yet he always liked to see her in the garments he knew best.

"Why don't you ever wear that lovely fawn-coloured dress that I admire so much?" he would ask her.

"My dear," she answered, with a laugh, "I wore it for four years. Wasn't that long enough? Stella said it was too faded and shabby for her to be seen about with me in it."

He neither counted money nor measured time: he was happy in the passing hours. Only the disappearance of an admired frock; the fact that Stella did not ride in a perambulator, but went out fishing with Gates and came down to late dinner; the list of his books in a publisher's advertisement—only such reminders as these told him that years had added themselves to years, that the sum of life was bigger.

His fame was always growing. He wrote to please himself, but what he wrote never failed to please the public. He wrote fables of the people, and his fables were more popular than his novels; he wrote volumes of short stories, and the public even allowed him to do that; translations of his books made him known throughout Europe. Because of his books half the world honoured and respected him. He was, locally, a celebrated feature of the lake, shown by fly-drivers, pointed at from steamer decks, photographed behind his back by everybody old enough to hold a camera. He was beloved by all the peasants and the boatmen, who cared nothing for Churchill the writer, but were very glad to talk about Churchill the man. When questioned concerning his books, they shook their heads and laughed. Not much of readers—but Signor Churchill was a grand signor and a good friend. He paid for the defence of Luigi and Antonio there, wrongly accused of smuggling. He gave the cow to Giulio's nephew. He was out on the mountain all night with the rest when little Vittoria and her mule got lost in the winter fog.

LII

As soon as Stella was old enough they did a little travelling. By the terms of his appointment, Allan Gates was free to be away from the middle of November to the end of March, because during this period there were scarcely any English left on the lake. Nevertheless, he regularly continued his Sunday services, sometimes with a congregation of only three persons—Lilian, Stella, and her governess. But on two or three occasions he was persuaded to join the Churchills in a winter jaunt.

They went up to the snowfields of the Engadine, but the keen light air did not suit Allan, and they hurried down again to the plains of Lombardy. Once they followed the sea coast from Toulon to Spezzia. They visited Rome, got as far south as Naples, and crossed the Straits to Sicily. Allan grew restive in the true atmosphere of Roman Catholicism. It was too grand and sleepy for him. His spirit was oppressed by the grey old towns, and the mingled gaudiness and squalor of the churches. The priests of the south, fat, indolent, with wine-stained, dirty cassocks, and double chins that needed shaving, made him feel irritation and contempt. The splendid old religion itself seemed to him really like some of the old towers and palaces—a grand outward form only; dust pretending to be stone, still standing high and awe-inspiring, defying the centuries; the work of man pretending to be solid and permanent as the work of God. These churches and castles seemed to speak with the very voice of Rome, saying they would last as long as the hills they crowned, yet all of them ready at a touch to fall into a cloud of white dust.

Stella enjoyed these wanderings, but she as well as the others liked their home best. She adored her father. At first, perhaps, Gates ran him hard in the race for her favour, but soon Daddy won. Daddy could not carpenter or make toys, and his rooms were less interesting to explore; but he told one curious things, he could look into one's mind and formulate the questions that one did not know how to express. And he could answer them, every one. When he read aloud, fairy stories became true, not stories that didn't really happen; and when he came to the end—the end that one knew by heart—he could go on reading, saying what occurred after the princess was happily married, all about her children and their names, and how after a time they found the palace so dull that they left it one night to search for the fairy that had formerly befriended their father and mother. And all this sequel wasn't in the book at all; it came straight out of Daddy's head, and nobody else could read it aloud to you.

By the time that she was ten years old they had become real companions. They understood each other. You had but to see them together to know how close was the bond of love. As they walked hand in hand about the garden, he no longer discussed such fabulous topics as the bears of Monte Legnoncino, or explained why the lake was as deep as the mountains were high, or why the unhappy village of Lezzeno had been put into disgrace and deprived of the sun in winter and the moon in summer; but they talked freely of abstract matters, as freely and as simply as if he and she were of the same age. He loved these walks and talks as much as she did. He did not try to teach her anything then or later, unless it was by leading her from external wonders towards the deep comfort of the inner life. He had no fear for her. Already she seemed to him calm and true and strong.

They had innocent secrets that nobody else knew of. Once in the summer, when the moon was at the full, he told her that he was going out at night to climb the high hill behind Griante to watch the sunrise from its summit; and she said she would be in their garden at dawn, standing on the upper terrace, and kiss her hand to him. She would do this at a certain minute, and at that exact minute he was to look down from the mountain. She insisted on this; she promised to wrap up properly, and go back to bed afterwards. So they carefully synchronised their watches, and decided on the appointed minute.

"At three-forty, Daddy. Remember, you are to look straight down towards me; and you will feel that I have flown up through the air and kissed you. You promise you won't forget?"

"I won't forget. But I hope that instead of waking, you'll stay snug in bed."

He was back for breakfast, and he said, "Thank you, Stella, for saying good-morning to me so nicely."

"You couldn't see me, of course?"

"No, but I knew that you were there."

"Did you feel what I said?"

"Yes, my darling, I felt that, and much more than you said."

The others did not know what they were talking about. It was one of their secrets. Perhaps she had secrets of her own that she could not share with him. She knew that there was something in her father's life because of which the world at one time had been unkind to him, and the thought of this made her feel a passionate longing to guard and protect him from the slightest touch of pain. This shadow of past trouble fell upon her faintly but coldly in the midst of sunlight. He was grand and famous now, and yet the vague cloud still remained upon his name. People were always praising him; and yet she could detect now and then a reservation in their praise that wounded her young pride and stabbed her loyal young heart.

He and she never spoke of religion. He had prepared himself for the sort of questions that children usually ask; but she never asked them. Had she been warned not to do so by her mother? He did not know; he did not inquire. She had, of course, been brought up in the orthodox faith. Allan Gates prepared her and some other English girls for confirmation, and in due course she was confirmed by the Bishop of West Europe on one of his enormous pastoral tours.

Her father went to church with her on the Sunday after she had taken her first communion. He used to attend the morning service perhaps twice a year, for the pleasure of sitting with his wife and daughter, and in order to be able to pay his friend compliments about the sermon.

His compliments were precious because he never said what he did not mean—whether to Gates, to his wife, or his child. Love has no limits. Love made Gates a really good preacher to Edward Churchill, even if he remained merely a fervent but poor performer to all the rest of the world.

When he told Lilian that she looked as young as ever, she knew that it was not true, but she knew that he believed it; and that was enough. If she had ever suffered, as women are supposed to suffer, in thinking of the time when the signs of age would fall upon her and her charm be lost, she suffered no longer. He had always answered that he could see no change in her. If she said it was absurd to talk like that, he smiled and shook his head. He did not really see that she was different in any outward respect from the girl who had come to him through darkness and pain, and with her hand in his had led him back to the light. He would never see. Love conquers all things—even the years.

He said, and believed, "You are more beautiful than you were—if, indeed, there is any difference." And if she argued, he chaffed her about Wheeler's famous article in the *Universal Magazine.* "Mr. Wheeler said more than I have done. I'll fetch it out. You had better read it again."

Mr. Wheeler was a visitor from America, and he had written an account of his visit to the villa by the lake. Churchill kept and treasured his copy of the magazine because of the sketch of Lilian.

After describing "the home of England's greatest fictionist," the writer said: "Churchill is a bigger optimist even than his books would lead one to suppose. His is an optimism of the far-reaching, all-embracing character. He believes in the future of the human race, and does not appear to attach any weight to the seeming evils of the hour. For him labour troubles, class antagonisms, war itself with all its unspeakable horrors, are but momentary checks to progress—they are like small impediments to the flow of a river, making it for a moment change its direction, only to resume it when the obstacle is passed.

. . . "But no picture of Edward Churchill would be complete without the pendent portrait of his wife. Mrs. Churchill is a beautiful and gracious lady, with a quiet unaffected manner, but great natural dignity. Tall and slender in figure, she has a face of the most refined English type, and yet which in the delicacy of the features, the play of expression and the soft lustrous eyes, recalls the beauty of some of our own southern women. Both she and her husband, one may add, are distinctly *un*-English in their absence of formality and reserve. The kindly welcome that they accorded to me as a stranger, with no better credentials than the fact that I could claim membership of the brotherhood of literature, impressed me to a notable degree."

Touring Americans were often provided with letters of introduction to Churchill by his New York publishers, and he liked these perhaps more than any other chance visitors. They were so fresh and original when compared with tired Londoners saturated with other people's worn-out thoughts and without a thought that belonged to themselves; so devoid of all pretension; so free from the ridiculous self-consciousness that fears to betray ignorance of matters quite outside one's own sphere of knowledge; so full of humour, vital energy, and intrinsic kindliness. He liked the hard-faced men of business whose words snapped like steel springs and whose hearts were like the hearts of little children. They sometimes talked as though the world was a market-place and its high altar a stock exchange, pretending to live only for the acquisition of hard cash, and yet perhaps ready to lay down life for an idea. He seemed to trace in the men and women alike this essential desire for the ideal and the willingness to stake all to obtain it, and he wondered if destiny would ever put them to the test.

These tourists from across the ocean never ran the risk of outstaying their welcome: without exception, they were all of them in a prodigious hurry.

"Now, Mr. Churchill, we'd just love to stay and laze away half a week on your *de*lightful lake; but it doesn't seem quite fair to cut out poor old Rome, and Venice, and the rest. Rome's had to wait a *long* time for Mrs. Binion and myself, and I guess she'd feel tired of sitting on her seven hills if we disappointed her."

"Come back to us on your way home."

"No, we can't do that anyhow. We aren't retracing our steps *this* trip. Time doesn't permit. But we shall take home a vurry pleasant memory of this afternoon, and of you and your charming wife and your amiable daughter."

More distinguished and less hurried representatives of American culture, writers, artists, diplomatists, came with the English and Continental crowd every spring and autumn. It was a cosmopolitan society in which sooner or later every one of note appeared. Indeed in the fashionable seasons there was no lack of varied company at the villa; and if Churchill as a writer needed material for the study of men and women of the world, it provided itself automatically and unfailingly. Politicians or statesmen, successful advocates or great lawyers, smartly-dressed women or grand ladies, well-known people or people of importance, the man of the hour or the moulder of to-morrow—whichever you cared to call them—they all in time presented themselves on the Churchills' terrace, to drink a cup of tea beneath the roses and give their host a chance of seeing their outward shapes and reading their inward mysteries.

With regard to the most famous of these guests, Stella and Gates nearly always said the same thing.

"He is not a bit like his pictures in the papers," said Stella.

And Gates said, "How easy he is to get on with!"

The great men were always easy to get on with. They sank into their basket-chairs, drank their tea, and ate their cake, as if they had been doing so yesterday, the day before and years ago; and they talked to Churchill as if they had known him all their lives. When the rest of their party wandered off about the garden, they still sat talking with him. When their boat was waiting to start and everybody else on board, they told the boat to go without them. They would walk back to the hotel by the road—and perhaps Churchill would stroll a little way with them, so that they might go on talking.

In the course of years many real friends dropped in on them—old friends discovered unexpectedly on landing-stages, who were at once made to move their baggage from their hotel, and put up at the villa. Thus, for the first time, chance brought them Prebendary and Mrs. Verschoyle; and Canon Nape and Monsignor Gardiner, sometime curates of St. Bede's. The Verschoyles came nearly every autumn, and no other friends were so dear to them.

Sometimes there surged up out of the past once familiar faces that they had never thought of or missed. In this manner suddenly appeared Mr. Milton Kirk of Danesborough and his secretary, Miss Jenkins. Churchill had seen them from his window without recognising them, as they slowly ascended the garden steps and paused to take breath on each terrace—a small, dapper gentleman in a yachting suit and cap, with field-glasses swung over his arm; and a gorgeously attired mature lady with a mauve parasol. Now they were in the drawing-room with Lilian, and Stella had been sent to fetch him. He put down his pen and went at once.

Mr. Kirk was standing on the hearthrug and talking volubly, reminding Lilian of how he had not only been the original discoverer of Churchill's talent, but its careful trainer. Mrs. Kirk sat near, admiring him. They were much grander-looking than of old, obviously very prosperous and opulent.

"How is Danesborough?" asked Churchill, after effusive hand-shakings.

"Danesborough," said Mr. Kirk impressively, "is making colossal progress—going slap bang ahead. You know the saying, 'What Manchester thinks to-day London thinks to-morrow?' Well, Danesborough thinks it the day before Manchester."

"And are you still working for *The Courier?*"

"I AM *The Courier;*" and Mr. Kirk said how he had bought out the old proprietary. He was also the owner of half a dozen other periodicals. He thought no more of launching a new paper nowadays than of having his breakfast. "But I did not come here to talk about myself." And he spoke again of his cleverness in having spotted Churchill as a likely winner in the race for literary fame.

"Miss Churchill, the 'umble individual before you now was your papa's first patron. Yes, young lady, this illustrious author, then a bashful beginner, used to bring me his immature efforts, and we put our heads together to screw them up to concert pitch. . . . You haven't forgotten, have you, Churchill? . . . I said to my wife there, 'There's something about Churchill's work that may puzzle many people, but it doesn't puzzle me. It is *genius.*' Yes, I said it then, un'esitatingly. All the world has said it since."

The late Miss Jenkins recalled this speech of her husband's, and said he had quoted his very words. She was grand, with her white frock, high heels, and delicate mauve parasol. She had jewelled bangles, and a little watch encrusted with diamonds, the tiny dial of which she consulted presently.

"Now, Milton," she said. "Remember, this is holiday time." And she explained that she wished his brain to rest as much as possible. The strain was more severe than ever.

Obviously she was very well pleased with herself; but she worshipped Mr. Kirk, and would always take the greatest care of him.

As they went back to the harbour and their boat, she spoke kindly and confidentially to Lilian.

"Aren't your husband's books splendid? I love them. I wonder the Government hasn't publicly recognised them."

"How do you mean?" asked Lilian.

"Why, by giving him a knighthood or something. They are going to make Milton a knight. It will be in the next Birthday Honours. . . . What a world it is. I wonder what I should have said if the fairies had told me that one day I should be Lady Milton Kirk."

When they reached the pier Mr. Kirk had still much to say to Churchill, and it was with difficulty that Mrs. Kirk embarked him.

"I must get him away," she whispered. "But when two old cronies get together, there's no separating them."

Churchill begged the Kirks to come to dinner any day; but Mrs. Kirk refused the invitation. Dinner parties excited Milton. As she explained, she got him off to bed immediately after the table-d'hôte. He had half a bottle of light wine at dinner, and she herself brought him his "night-cap" when she had tucked him in. "But many thanks, all the same. It's depriving him of a pleasure, but it's for his own good. I think his brain is like a steam-engine: it is always working at high pressure."

Mr. Kirk brandished his field-glasses and Mrs. Kirk waved her parasol as the boat glided away with them. The Churchills stood at the end of the pier by the fishermen's shrine till the boat became a small speck on the broad surface of the lake. Then they went back to the house, all three together, lingering among the perfumed shrubs, turning on terrace steps to look back at the great shadow of their mountain as it crept up the slope on the other shore and the evening sunlight as it began to glow red on the crest of the hills above Varenna. Then at last the writer returned to his desk and went on writing.

Visitors squandered a lot of his time. But to all he was courteous and kind, and all were the better for seeing him. Something he gave unconsciously, something they took away that made them a little richer—the prosperous Kirks, the successful politicians, the tired advocates, the expansive, warm-hearted wanderers from the great Republic, even the pretty, worldly ladies with husbands they did not care to show and lovers they could not contrive to hide. It was the divine gift of sympathy. The humble people, the peasants, knew what it was well enough, and came for it without scruple as a right—in every trouble; their love affairs, their business enterprises, their little family vendettas; their hopes, their fears, their crimes.

He would lay down his pen, and give them an hour—a day—two days. He would see the lawyers for them, he would go to Milan for them; there was nothing that he would not do for them.

Lilian and Stella tried to save him from interruptions, but in vain. He would not be the guarded prophet or the sheltered muse. He worked when he could. Like all authors, he had his favourite hours, when his pen seemed to run easiest, and perhaps his best and most cherished time was on Sunday mornings.

The church bell ceased its music; his ladies with their prayer books in their hands had just passed the window, and the maids were hurrying down the stairs; dear old Allan was busily engaged, and would not come in and out of the room for a couple of hours. The whole house fell silent; the Sabbath hush had descended on land and water; not a murmur came from the hillside, not a rustle from the lake. He used to feel that he was absolutely alone with his work, and the pen moved faster and faster.

LIII

At the beginning of a week late in October Allan Gates fell sick with influenza. This was the first time since he left England that there had been anything wrong with him. On Monday the Italian doctor from Tremezzo ordered him to go to bed, but promised that he would be on his legs again by Sunday. Allan's one anxiety was about the Sunday services. Although at this late period of the year very few English were still here, the mere thought of the church doors being closed against them sent up his temperature and made him toss and turn in bed. Such a failure would spoil his record for ever.

On Thursday, when he should have been allowed to get up, he was still held prisoner by the doctor, and he judged it prudent to ascertain that a substitute would be available, if required, to take his place on Sunday. During the regular season the shore was almost black with parsons, but now one would not have so wide a choice. The churchwardens had already departed. Stella, however, sent out spying for Allan, brought back a report that she had seen four black coats—the one at the "Britannia"; a new one out in a boat with some ladies; and other two sitting in the hall at the "Bellevue." Four blackbirds, not likely to be flown before Sunday. Allan felt reassured.

On Saturday morning he got up without permission, and was sitting in a chair when the doctor came. The doctor sent him back to bed, to stay there till further orders. Lilian and Stella, sent forth to search, found the four birds flown. Not a parson left on the shore. All day long they telegraphed and telephoned here and there, up and down the lake. No parson available. No service to-morrow. Allan was in despair. He lay writhing and tossing, saying he did not care what his temperature might be; he would be up to-morrow and be at the church at 8 A. M., if he could stand.

"What is it at eight o'clock?" asked Churchill, sitting with him in the evening. "Communion?"

"No, only Matins—chiefly for the English waiters and the clerk from the 'Bellevue.' "

"And what is it at eleven o'clock?"

"Morning Prayer and Litany."

"Allan, I'll do the services for you," said Churchill.

Allan looked at him, gave a gasp, and then sank back in bed, perspiring, joyful. "God bless you, dear old fellow! Oh, God bless you!"

The fervent gratitude of Allan's tone, his extreme emotion, his gasp or cry of joy on hearing his friend's words, startled Churchill. It had seemed to him such a small thing to say. Why should it seem so much to Allan? Churchill had spoken on the impulse of the moment, without thought or doubt. His friend wanted something done, and he could do it. It was nothing for him to do. Of course he must do it. It was a call that he had answered automatically.

"Now settle down," he said, "and get to sleep."

"Yes, I shall sleep to-night," said Allan, in the same joyful tone.

Churchill going, put his head back into the room to ask if he should find a surplice and everything else at the church.

"Yes, dear old fellow. I have given Lilian the keys."

"That'll be all right then," said Churchill.

But a little later Lilian came to him, with shining eyes and lips trembling.

"Allan has told me. Oh, Edward, does this mean—oh, let me know what it means."

"My dearest," he said, rather blankly, "it means nothing;" and he took her hands and pressed them gently. "Dear old Allan was in a hole—so I offered to do it for once. But I hope you don't think it is wrong. Allan did not. It is only for this once—to make him easy."

"Yes," she said, "you have made Allan easy;" and she released her hands, and turned away.

"Lilian, I hadn't thought of my position—as a priest who had been inhibited. I hadn't thought of myself at all—except that I should be able to get through the services all right. But if you feel that I haven't the right to do it—if you think it wrong, I must tell him I can't do it."

"No," she said sadly. "I don't think it wrong. I could never think anything you did was wrong. Only it set me thinking——" and her eyes filled with tears. "But I understand now."

He sat meditating after she had gone.

Was it wrong? Surely not. All that episode of his quarrel with the Church and the manner in which he had left it seemed so immensely remote. It was like something that had happened in the life of another man. Who else would trouble to remember it? Who would know or care? No one here would wonder about it.

He had not thought of religion in regard to himself since the time long ago when his child recovered from her dangerous illness. He had determined then that he would not think of these things, and he had adhered to his resolution. Nothing in the happy years had ever revived the feelings of that period. His life since then had been so peaceful and yet so full: the world all round him and the worlds of his imagination had been all sufficient to him.

In his books he had never spoken of religion, but now and then the public Press had made allusions to the fact of his having been a clergyman. Critics who wished to appear knowing sometimes called him the Reverend Edward Churchill; critics who wished to be nasty had not scrupled to call him an infidel and an atheist. No one could call him a materialist, for in everything that he had ever written the triumph of spirit over matter had been the essential idea conveyed; but it was, as he knew, generally assumed both by readers and by critics that he was not an orthodox believer.

Suddenly, and for a few moments, it seemed a queer thing that he was intending to do now. To those who really knew his life-history, this act might seem like a public recantation. They might say of him, "Edward Churchill has recanted. He has stood up before men and God, and owned that he was at fault, and they were right. Yet he does not now really believe. Therefore he is one of two things: a liar or a hypocrite."

But in another moment everything dropped into its proper place and took its old proportional value. What people may think about him—and they won't think—is of no importance. It is utterly trivial. The only important thing was to serve his friend. He would have gone and swept out stables, climbed ladders and laid bricks, stood on the high road and begged—done his friend's task for him, whatever it was, while he lay sick.

He fetched out his manuscript notes and began to write. He had mortgaged to-morrow morning, and would make up for lost time by doing a little work to-night.

Allan slept soundly, and was still asleep when Churchill went out to do the first service. There were only five people in the church.

There were more people at eleven o'clock, perhaps as many as thirty; and he conducted the service beautifully, without the least sign of embarrassment, and with only the very slightest emotional feeling. He was extremely careful, reading what he would have recited from memory in the old days, and he made no slips.

Inwardly and outwardly he was calm. Strangers in the church were struck by his outward aspect, and saw in him a faithful carrier of the divine message. He stood there, tall and thin, his hair sleek as silk, silver grey; his clean-shaven face, darkened by the Italian sun, like a beautiful mask; the features exquisitely refined, with all sensual character gone utterly, and yet with strength remaining, visibly indicated by the frontal ridge and the firm though thin-lipped mouth. He looked at once an ideal priest and an intellectual aristocrat. The benign light of all-embracing love was in his eyes when he delivered the last words.

No one could have guessed. From the moment of his first kneeling, till now as he stood with raised hand and the sunlight through the windows crowning him, in a glory rather than a petty halo, he has been God's perfect messenger. Yet he felt nothing beyond love of humanity. If God were here, in this little church, why did he not feel the mysterious presence? Why did not he realise that he was no longer alone on the chancel steps? He seemed to be quite alone. But he could not have said, even in thought, "There is nothing here. There is no God. There never was a God."

These others believed. All can believe, except himself. Looking down at the faces, he could read their hearts. In their different degrees all these people truly believed. There was glorious faith here and there. It was shining clear from his wife and his child—from the old lady in the second pew

—and that old man—and from the other old dame. From the others—if not the perfect untroubled faith, at least the yearning for it, and a hope that will bring it; or, at the lowest, the firm belief that this life is a prelude, that something larger is to come. And who but a fool would take the belief from them? Pity and love filled his thought, as he read these few hearts.

For some it is not perhaps much; for the rest it is everything. And this little pause in the quiet church is good for all. Who that thinks can doubt it? If it were only to tie the tongue for an hour a week, it were worth building churches to win that silence.

After the blessing he made a slip, forgetting what came next. He thought it was all over. Instead of kneeling in front of the altar and hiding his face in his hands, he sat down in the big chair by the wall, in the shadow, with hand on elbow, watching the congregation go out.

He thought that he could see quite plainly the good of it to these faithful ones. They have palpably changed beneath his watching eyes. The old lady in the second pew is praying, is dreaming. She rises from her knees, and it is as if she wraps about her a cloak of dignity which she did not wear on entering. Her face is grave and calm; she is old and fragile, but she walks more strongly, with a braver, nobler carriage. She has been kneeling, as she thinks, at the steps of a throne, and has heard gracious promises; and something of Majesty will cling to her for a little while. In imagination he follows her out into the sunlight, in imagination hears her voice. She has neither sought nor shunned her friends and gently she resigns herself again to the babbling untied tongues; but in her voice and eyes there is something still of the glory of her dream. Who but a fool would rob her of the dream?

Allan was much better in the week, and all right by Saturday. But he asked Edward to help him again. It is Communion Sunday. Allan will do it all himself, every bit of it; but he would like to have Edward at his side, in case of failure. Edward is to be there just to support him, and will not have to open his mouth.

Edward consented. He will dress once again as an officiating priest, and that will be the end of it. Once more, and for the last time. Why not? Allan wants him.

He put his head in at the door. "But, I say, old boy, have you two surplices? Can you fit me out as well as yourself?"

"Oh, yes," said Allan joyously. "I'll fit you out." His face beaming in happiness.

So Edward Churchill made his second appearance behind the altar rails.

And now Allan Gates was convinced that all he had longed for and prayed for had at last come to pass. Edward had come back to them—returned to the fold—been brought home in due season. Not to Allan the glory. He had been content to watch and pray throughout the long years, but never once had his confidence wavered. In God's good time the thing would happen. And he felt certain that it had happened now.

He would not allow Lilian to doubt the splendid truth of it.

"Knowing him as I do, I know that it can mean nothing else." And he said how he had really felt sure from the moment, eight days ago, when Edward offered to take the services for him. "He could not have done this otherwise. Although he may not, at first, have realised why it had become possible to him. So you may say the first time was nothing. But the second time proves it. Have no fear."

"May I ask him if it is so?"

"Yes, ask him. Have no fear. Let us go to him now."

Thus his friend and his wife came to him; Lilian's face all joyous, and Allan rubbing his hands together.

"Edward, is it true?" And she asked him explicitly if he had recovered his lost belief.

He started, looked at their eager faces, and checked the answer that was rising to his lips. Then, after an almost imperceptible pause, he answered gravely and firmly that what they wished was true. Without consciously searching for the words, he had so framed his answer as to avoid a personal declaration of belief; but, however worded, the sense of the answer was unequivocal. He made them think that what they had hoped for was true.

This was his last great renunciation—costing him something even now. Must one deny one's deepest right, may not one have one secret innermost place that is one's very own? No; for those you love, give all. No holding back to yourself—no limitations or half measures. Give yourself, your life, your all. Why not? What is it really? What does it count—to bring happiness to the loved wife, the loved friend? They want it—that is enough. As to the dignity of self, which forbids one to subscribe to the recantation of one's thoughts—that is too vain and futile. The mirror is the guide.

One look at their faces told him that he was right. They were radiantly happy. Henceforth, so far as those two are concerned, he must act a lie—if he cannot make it the truth. They must always think it is the truth.

And perhaps in dread of widening consequences, or merely as an instinctive precaution, he gently pleaded for his old freedom of action.

"I don't think I should care to go to church very regularly—perhaps scarcely at all;—I mean no more than in the past."

"No, no. Whatever you like," cried Gates. And Lilian agreed. They are absolutely content, and will leave him unmolested. He is safe now—that is all they craved to know for certain.

The acting of a lie would not do. The truth and nothing but the truth was required. It had been a foolish thought, if he supposed that anything less would suffice.

He could not write, either that day or the days that followed. He sat idle in his room, or wandered out of the house by himself. He wanted to be alone; he was afraid of the company of those who were dear to him. Something had come between him and them. They were not conscious of it; it was only he who knew that when they fancied they had drawn closest to him, a barrier that might prove impenetrable had suddenly arisen to separate them. But that must not be.

He said to himself, "I will accept the working hypothesis. I will believe all that I can; I will believe all that I *can't*—for their sakes. Love has no limits to its demands, or to its power. It takes all, but it can give all. Love can make me believe. Perhaps nothing else."

In this sense he longed to believe and prayed for belief. He longed for the still larger, richer life which he could reach now with belief added—more infinitely, than when he was young, and, except for his mother, had no ties that bound him to earthly things. If behind and beyond the beauty of these lakes, and the hills and their fragrant vesture of flowers, he could see the beauty of the eternal world of spirit, as Lilian could, as Stella could, as Allan could, how much, much joy would be added. Above all, he longed for the close communion of spirit with the three people that he loved more than himself, his work, his life.

He looked into his own mind, and it seemed that there was nothing there that was not either a reflection of external objects or the memory of them, or the print of the impulses that had come from them and passed through him. His best thoughts had always come to him seemingly from outside, even his imaginations or inventions. It seemed that he had originated nothing from within. Faith had entered into him, doubt had entered into him, disbelief had entered into him. He remembered how he had once fancied that the highest task of his life would be to chase doubt from great men's minds—minds so much stronger than his. Why cannot he do this now for himself? And again came the thought, "Love can do it for me. If I am passive, love will do it—love *shall* do it."

So when Sunday morning came he did not use his freedom. He went to church and knelt by Lilian's side, with his mind cleaned and emptied, his heart like the heart of a child.

LIV

It was autumn again, after a perfect summer. September had a ripeness and fullness that surpassed all previous months; the air was dreamy, the earth gave forth sweet perfumes. In every vineyard one met groups of laughing girls, and high on the hillside one heard laughter and music; the world had become a harvest festival.

One Sunday afternoon the Churchills rowed across the lake to attend a *festa* organised by the Roman priests. The village landing-place was one of the largest on the lake, with shallow steps on three sides; and beyond there was an open space surrounded by trimmed planes and used often for a market. On the far side of this, a rapid ascent through cypress trees led one to the piazza of the church. Before the landing-steps big peasant-boats used to lie at anchor throughout the week. But to-day dozens of boats of all sorts were tied up, gently bobbing and scraping, so that the watery space was like the enclosure of a race-course; and more and still more boats were coming. All the shore was crowded. Processions of priests and their followers were moving beneath bright-coloured banners; a band was playing; the church bells rang.

They tied up their boat, and Churchill remained in it, while Allan, Lilian, and Stella went to "do the *festa*"—and see all that there was to be seen.

What can they see? Out here from the boat it is all colour, movement, and confusion, without meaning apparent—but one can piece it together. It is the pageant of life in little. Is it more at close range? When you stand in the crowd, is the meaning apparent? You must go where the pressure guides you. They are all going one way: then surely the goal is worth reaching?

All the beautiful pageant of life—does it matter, the size of the stage, the number of the actors? Here are the peasants: men and women and children, bringing their votive offerings—all that the earth itself yields—fruit, flowers, and beasts. Not much. But our pope has big pockets, takes the kind thought for the rich gift—takes both; and our father at Rome has many fêtes. Let us hope he may get all he wants when he puts all together. Thus they go, the poor peasants—bright-eyed slaves of a magic that makes them happy. Here are the muttering priests, robed as rich as a pope, and all one with a pope to the peasants. The banners wave and gladden the eye, the little boys sing, and the maidens whisper; and the smoke from the censor swings out and rises and fades; and the prayers and the hopes in the muttered words are as smoke, soon lost in the sunlight. The babe on its mother's arm clutches, without sense of space or bulk, at the glittering cope, the lofty cross with its dazzling jewels, at the sun itself; and cries when it finds its hand still empty. Here are policemen, soldiers, shopkeepers from the town. Here are the smart hotel visitors from Bellagïo and Cadenabbia, men in Panama hats, women in rainbow dresses, mingling with the humble throng—of it completely, yet thinking themselves above it;—all nations these, with no link to bind them unless it be that they all are bound in golden fetters; lords, ladies—princes from the princely villas—all come out to kill time, without a shiver in the warm sunlight because they all know it is time that will kill them. This is the pageant of life. What actors are missing?

He waited patiently in the boat for a long time—till again the boats are going. And his mind is vacant and peaceful. There is nothing there now but the bright pure flame and a crystal clear mirror. Time is gone, and space is annihilated. He rouses himself when the others return, smiles at them—a wonderful smile, and a welcoming look that goes to their hearts.

But at such times, when he cannot count the gliding minutes or think in words, the thought-vapour must be there—something that transcends thought. Day by day the power of thought is strengthening, widening. He is wiser every day, stronger. Books that were difficult are now easy to read—and men are as easy to read as books. Something like the clairvoyant wisdom—far-reaching, barrier-breaking—of the greatest thinkers has come to him, slowly and surely, by not thinking.

The lake is most beautiful, at all hours. Allan is sculling them very slowly—merely paddling—and husband, wife and child sit together beneath the awning.

"Pull it down," says the girl. "The sun cannot hurt us now."

"Nothing can hurt us now," he says dreamily.

The screen is lowered, to give them a wider view; and the boat glides slowly onward by the shore.

Beneath them are the silent depths; over the surface of the water light airs come creeping from the gates of the other lake, and with the gentle breeze is borne to them the far-off sounds of life—faint music, evening bells, herdsmen calling. Hidden from them on the other lake, behind the wooded hill, there is a pleasure steamer making restless noise to remind them of the world. The unceasing, rhythmic and yet fretful beat of the unseen paddle-wheel throbs faintly on the ear. It is the heart-beat of the world—futile, furious, unceasing.

They glide on, past the stately villas, backs of humble houses clustered at the foot of quarried cliffs, hanging woods, gardens and vineyards, and again the stately villas. The shore is a beautiful picture unfolding itself. But Edward Churchill looks at it in the water—the reflected, inverted picture that little children love. Hold your gaze on the depths, and you never know what the picture will be till it comes. In this steady sunlight, the color and the solidity of the mirage are as perfect as the objects they represent. But the mirage forms, glows, fades, and is utterly gone as you pass. Look back, and no trace is left—only the silent depths.

Cypresses, stone steps, flowers festooned on marble balustrades; smooth lawns, palace walls—this is wealth. Don't look forward, don't look back. A little beach and a fisherman's boat, a cabin and a slated roof—this is poverty. Don't look back. Don't look forward. The picture has formed, gained strength, and vanished. And this is all that life can show as one passes. We may try to stand still, to keep the picture with us; but in truth we cannot. The shadows are falling, the light itself is fading; our picture must change, even if we do not move. In a little while it will be gone as completely as if we ourselves had passed on.

LV

THE fact of Churchill's doing duty for his sick friend did not go unnoticed. It was reported in England, and it had caused some trouble. The trustees of the church, when they heard of it, desired an explanation from Gates. Was it not highly irregular, in view of Mr. Churchill's status; or were they under a misapprehension on this point? The ecclesiastical authorities also became aware of the occurrence, and, off and on, throughout the winter, Allan Gates had been mildly badgered by them. He was obliged to send lengthy answers to letters from the Bishop of West Europe. He said nothing to Edward or to Lilian about these little worries.

It was the custom of the Bishop and his wife—when crossing their gigantic diocese in spring and autumn—to stay two or three days with Allan and the Churchills. But they had not come this spring. They would be here, no doubt, before the autumn was over. The Bishop knew all about Churchill, was familiar with the details of his whole career. He was a dry little chap; old, genial, but fond of argument; he would often tackle Churchill at dinner, not as a bishop but as a man of the world, discussing his books, making him stand up in self-defence, and explain the logic of incidents or the development of characters. But he liked Churchill very much, and was one of the most tolerant of men.

He and his wife duly turned up at the end of September, on a glorious day about tea-time. After tea his good lady withdrew to her room to repose herself, while he and the others went out upon the lake. Allan sculled stroke, Miss Stella bow; Edward Churchill steered, with the bishop on one side of him and Lilian on the other. The boat shot out from the pier in grand style; the scullers settled to their work with a will; then, taking things easier, slackened the pace, and the progress was gentle, peaceful, lullingly smooth.

As they glided along, the Bishop opened his mind.

He told Edward Churchill about the clerical fuss and annoyance. He, the bishop, had himself been badgered.

Letters, interviews—even a visit to Lambeth. Everybody was, of course, delighted that Churchill had come back to the fold—but there really was very considerable scandal and fuss, which, fortunately, he has now been able to set right.

"Is it real?"—Even that had been asked in regard to Churchill's vindication of his religious belief. The Bishop knew well that there was no ground for such a question; he knew the absolute genuineness of this unreserved recognition of past error and resumption of a faith that had never been totally abandoned. Otherwise he would not be saying these words. But fame has its penalties. A public man is public property, and his owners will talk about him. When you have countless admirers, you must have detractors also among the small, envious souls who like to think and speak evil of the great. Moreover, on the technical side of the matter—well, one must be governed by those who are appointed to govern. A clergyman who has been inhibited, a clergyman without a license "to preach the word of God and administer the sacraments——" Really our friend Gates quite put himself in the wrong.

Allan and the girl had ceased rowing; the boat drifted on.

"And the crux may occur again," the Bishop continued. It would be very convenient to Gates, it would be useful to everybody, to have a substitute ready. It would be useful, as an object lesson for the world, to have such a man—to have this particular man. Churchill in his surplice answers all the questions, hushes all the scandal as to Churchill's infidelity and that ancient quarrel with the authorities.

So the Bishop has obtained the lifting of the ban, and he proposes to appoint Edward Churchill as a chaplain, honorary, to himself. Churchill will have no duties to perform; the appointment will be a sinecure that carries with it neither function nor emolument, but it will give a proper status as a priest. And by his manner and his tone he conveyed to all of them that in this he intends not only to rehabilitate Edward Churchill most handsomely, but to do him considerable honour.

Thus Churchill can wear the Sunday surplice without qualms. He can resume the week-day livery, and show himself boldly on lake and shore in the orthodox collar and black coat.

Churchill sat tongue-tied. The Bishop was smiling at him with great kindness; Lilian had laid her hand on his; Allan was beaming. His daughter, leaning to one side, showed her bright face, and he could read in it her pride and love. To her this is most splendid tidings—rehabilitation, acknowledgment of father's true worth at last, the lifting of that cloud upon his name. He had not known till now that she harboured these feelings.

The boat drifted on, in the golden sunlight, on the bosom of the deep lake; and there was silence. Churchill remembered the hour when, throwing off the coat and collar, he made a vow that he would never again carry the ugly yoke of superstition. But that was not really himself: that was another man. In his rage and revolt he had called his priestly garb the devil's livery. Now he may wear it again.

"What say you to that?" asked the Bishop.

"I say you are very kind," said Churchill, with a catch of the breath. "Very, very kind. And I thank you—I thank you."

Then they were all happy—all thanking the kind Bishop. Allan and the girl poised their sculls, and bent and swung. They talked gaily, while the steersman sat mute. The sunlight fell bright on the lake, glancing on the surface, not piercing the silent depths. But the steersman was happy. The flame was leaping high; the mirror was crystal clear.

THE END

PR Maxwell, William Babington
6025 The mirror and the lamp
A93M5

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY